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VOL. VII

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LONDON

JOHN WATSON AND SONS

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HORÆ HOMILETICÆ:

OR

DISCOURSES

(PRINCIPALLY IN THE FORM OF SKELETONS)

NOW FIRST DIGESTED INTO ONE CONTINUED SERIES,

AND FORMING A COMMENTARY

UPON EVERY BOOK OF

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT;

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED,

AN IMPROVED EDITION OF A TRANSLATION OF

CLAUDE'S ESSAY ON THE COMPOSITION OF A SERMON.

IN TWENTY-ONE VOLUMES.

BY THE REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M.A.

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I S A I A H.

DCCCXCVII.

GOD'S CARE FOR HIS CHURCH.

Isai. xxvii. 3. *I the Lord do keep it: I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.*

GOD has provided abundant consolation for his Church in seasons of the greatest trial: and he calls upon her to enjoy her privileges and to celebrate them in “a responsive song^a,” in firm expectation of safety, amidst the most awful and desolating judgments.

The first part of the song, which is begun by Jehovah himself, leads us to shew,

I. Whence the Church derives her security—

The Church, like a vineyard, is set apart in order to a more careful cultivation—

[This idea is elsewhere more fully opened by the same prophet^b: and it well illustrates the care taken to separate the Church from the world at large, and the exertions made to render her fruitful in the fruits of righteousness.]

At the same time she also resembles a vineyard, in that she is exposed to the assaults of many who would destroy her—

[A vineyard, however carefully fenced in, may have its fences broken down, and its plants destroyed, if it be not watched and guarded^c. And the Church is open to the incursion of numerous and potent enemies, who would soon destroy her, if she were not protected from their assaults.]

^a ver. 2. should rather have been translated, “Sing ye to the beloved vineyard a responsive song.”

^b Isai. v. 1, 2.

^c Isai. v. 5, 6. Ps. lxxx. 8—16.

But she is preserved by an invisible, but almighty Protector—

[Jehovah himself interposes on her behalf. He preserves her, as the bush in the midst of the flames, burning, but not consumed^d. He protects his Church *in general*, that “the gates of hell may not prevail against her;” and he keeps all her members *in particular*, that none may be ever plucked out of his hand^e.]

Nor shall we tremble for her future welfare, when we consider,

II. What prospect she has of continued preservation—

The same Jehovah who says, “*I do keep her*,” adds also, “*I will*.” He promises (still keeping up the metaphor of a vineyard),

1. Culture—

[In a country that had only periodical rains, pools or reservoirs of water were indispensably necessary for the preservation of the vines in a season of drought. The Church too, and all the plants that are in it, need to be watered by God’s word^f, and Spirit^g. Now God promises that he will take this care upon himself, and execute the work, as it were, with his own hands. Yea, inasmuch as we need fresh supplies of grace, not only every *day*, like a vineyard, but every *moment*, (as we need the light of the sun,) God suits his promise to our necessities, and tells us he will water us “every moment.”]

2. Protection—

[Our care in cultivating a vineyard would be in vain, unless we also protected it from those who would destroy it. Thus the Church, and every individual believer, would in vain receive the culture, if it did not enjoy also the protection, of heaven. But God promises to afford his people *continual*, and *effectual* protection. He will guard them “night and day” (for “he neither slumbers nor sleeps”) and will keep them, not only from destruction, but from any real injury: “No weapon formed against them shall ever prosper^h.”]

We LEARN from hence,

1. Where to look in the midst of *national* calamitiesⁱ—

^d Exod. iii. 2. ^e Matt. xvi. 18. John x. 29. Ps. xlv. 5.

^f 1 Cor. iii. 6. Deut. xxxii. 2. ^g Isai. xlv. 3, 4.

^h Isai. liv. 17.

ⁱ This is proper for a time of war: and if it be not used, the latter head may be changed thus—We have here MATTER, 1. For grateful

[God has, in this land, a remnant, over whom he watches with the tenderest care, and for whose sake we trust he will spare the whole nation. At all events we may be sure that he will provide a hiding-place for his Church; so that, whatever be the fate of others, it shall not be overwhelmed^k. Let us not then trust in fleets and armies, but in the living God, who is omnipresent to behold, and almighty to defeat, the plots of our enemies: and let our supplications be made with increased frequency and fervour to him, whose past interpositions we have such abundant reason to acknowledge^l.]

2. Where to look in the midst of *personal* troubles—

[That which alone we ought to desire, is, that nothing may “hurt” us. As for the pruning, which may render us more fruitful^m, it should be received with submission and gratitude. The evils that tend to our destruction, we may deprecate, with an assurance that our prayer shall be heard and answered. We need not fear the drought which occasions God to water us, nor the weapons that call forth his effectual interposition. Only let us render him fruits suited to the culture bestowed upon us; and nothing shall come upon us without necessityⁿ; nothing which shall not eventually work for our good^o.]

recollection—that we have been preserved amidst so many enemies : 2. For humble confidence—that, though God may *prune* us, no trial shall come, but what he judges necessary, 1 Pet. i. 6. and shall work for our good, Rom. viii. 28.

^k Isai. xxvi. 20, 21.

^l Ps. cxxiv. 1—6.

^m John xv. 2.

ⁿ 1 Pet. i. 6.

^o Rom. viii. 28.

DCCCXCVIII.

THE FUTURE PROSPERITY OF ISRAEL.

Isai. xxvii. 6. *He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit.*

OF all the people upon the earth, the Jews have been, beyond comparison, the most highly honoured of their God. To no other nation did Jehovah ever manifest himself by such miraculous interpositions; nor was any other ever blessed with such rich and glorious communications. Even their present state, degraded as it is, evinces the peculiar interest which Jehovah takes in them: for, though scattered over the face of the whole earth, they still remain a separate people; and are reserved for higher honours,

and more signal blessings, than their most favoured ancestors ever enjoyed. The various nations that, in successive ages, have oppressed them, the Egyptian, Assyrian, Chaldean, Grecian, Roman, have all sunk beneath the yoke which their respective conquerors have laid upon them, and have been mingled with their invaders in one common mass. Not so the Jews: they, though more cruelly oppressed than any, have still been kept distinct from the people amongst whom they have dwelt: and to this remarkable event the prophet refers, in the words following my text: "Hath God smitten him, as he smote those who smote him? or is he slain according to the slaughter of them that are slain by him?" No: "though God has made a full end of all other nations, he has not made a full end of them:" but he still has his eye upon them for good; and will, in due season, fulfil to them all his purposes of love and mercy: "He will yet cause them to take root, and blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit."

In these words we may see,

I. What the Jews are destined to become—

Their state, both political and moral, is at present as low as can well be conceived. Scattered as they are amongst all nations, they have never yet been affiliated with any, so as to be regarded on a par with other citizens, or to enjoy the rights belonging to all the other classes of the community. The possession of landed property has been, till of late, universally denied them; so that they could never "take root" in any place, or be established in any country under heaven.

Nor have they been less degraded in their moral and religious character. Being despised of all, they have not been accustomed to respect themselves, or to affect that high sense of honour which elevates the characters of other people. In their religious assemblies they have not even the semblance of piety; so carnal are they in their spirit, and so irreverent in

their whole conduct. Not "a blossom or a bud" of true godliness is to be seen among them: and so far are they from "filling the world with fruit," that they are altogether immersed in selfishness, and lost to every thing but worldly gain.

But far other things are reserved for them. The time is coming when they shall be established in knowledge, fertile in piety, and abundant in usefulness throughout the world—

1. They shall be established in the knowledge of the true Messiah—

[They shall yet, I doubt not, take root" in their own land. So plainly is their future restoration foretold, that, if I did not know that some pious persons entertain doubts respecting it, I should be ready to say, it is impossible for any one who believes the Scriptures to question it. But with this, the Society which advocates their cause has nothing to do. It is with their spiritual concerns alone that we are called to interest ourselves: and we are fully assured, that our labour, in this respect, shall not be in vain. They have hitherto been ever ready to run after false Messiahs. Indeed, they have never conceived aright respecting the character of the Messiah whom God has promised to them, nor of the nature of that kingdom which he will establish in the earth. But the time is coming, when the veil shall be taken from their hearts; and when they shall see, beyond a possibility of doubt, that Jesus is the Christ. They have in their own Scriptures that which will tend to their establishment far beyond any other people on earth: and we may well expect, that, when they shall be brought to the knowledge of Christ, they will "take root" in him with a firmness that shall never be shaken. They will see how the whole of their ceremonial law shadows him forth; and how the moral law also directs them to him. They will see that all the prophets, with one voice, point to him as the promised Messiah: and, from this weight of evidence, they will feel a conviction, which heathens can scarcely ever attain. Exceeding deep will be their insight into the truths of the Gospel, when God shall "reveal to them," as he has promised, "the abundance of peace and truth^a:" "The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord shall bind up the breach of his people, and heal the stroke of their wound^b." When once "they shall look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn," so clear will be their views, and so

^a Jer. xxxiii. 6.

^b Isai. xxx. 26.

deep their convictions, that it will be as if they saw him face to face: as it is said, "They shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion^c."

2. They shall be fertile in the fruits of piety—

[As they are destined to "take root downward, so are they ordained also to bear fruit upward^d." In that day shall be fulfilled that gracious declaration of Jehovah, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon: his branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon^e." Much, very much, is spoken in the Scriptures respecting the spiritual change that shall then be wrought in them: "God will give them a new heart, and a new spirit will he put within them; and he will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh; and will cause them to walk in his statutes, and to keep his judgments and do them^f." In truth, the whole figurative language of prophecy, though primarily applicable to their temporal prosperity, has a further and far more important reference to their spiritual state: "Instead of the thorn, shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off^g.]

3. They shall be abundant in usefulness throughout the world—

["They shall fill the face of the world with fruit." Yes, verily, they are God's appointed instruments for the conversion of the whole world. This is one end for which God, in his providence, has scattered them over the whole earth. He has sent them, unconscious and uncalled-for, even as the clouds of heaven, to pour out the blessings with which they are fraught, and to fertilize the desert places of the earth. The Prophet Micah speaks of them in these remarkable terms: "The remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles, in the midst of many people, as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men^h." It is thus that God has prepared the way for the conversion of the whole Gentile world. The Jews, in all the different countries of the earth, possess their own Scriptures, whereon Christianity is founded; and, being conversant with the languages of the people amongst whom they sojourn, they will be ready to proclaim the truth the very instant that the veil is removed from their own hearts. And that this is their

^c Isai. lii. 8.

^d Isai. xxxvii. 31.

^e Hos. xiv. 4—6.

^f Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

^g Isai. lv. 13.

^h Mic. v. 7.

destined office, we are sure: for God himself says respecting them, "They shall declare my glory among the Gentiles; and they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord, out of all nations, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the Lord, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord^l." They are the appointed reapers of the whole world. Precisely as, by the Jews, God, in the apostolic age, reaped the first-fruits of the Gentiles, so will he, in due season, gather in by them the whole harvest.]

Here then we may also see,

II. What we ought now to be—

We are God's Israel, as much as ever they were; and heirs of all these blessings no less than they: for, "if we be Christ's, then are we Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise^k." Standing, then, in this relation to the Deity, can we doubt our obligation to serve and honour him? Surely it becomes all who "name the name of Christ,"

1. To take root in him—

[This is expressly told us by the Apostle Paul: "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, *rooted* and built up *in him*, and *established in the faith* as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving^l." We are, by our very profession, "plants of righteousness, of the Lord's planting;" and it is on Christ Jesus that we stand. Into him we must shoot forth our roots: and from him must we derive all the sap and nourishment, whereby we are to live, and to bring forth fruit to his glory. Nothing is to move us from him, even for a moment: nor must we entertain a thought of finding support from any other than him. It is "in him that all fulness dwells;" and "out of his fulness must we receive" all our supplies of grace and strength. Our whole life must be one continued exercise of faith in him; and we must "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart."]

2. To bring forth fruit to his glory—

[Christians must not be like the world around them, "barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord;" but abounding in the fruits of righteousness, which are, by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." Would you form a perfect idea of this distinction, go and behold two trees, one laden with leaves only, the other covered with blossoms and

^l Isai. lxvi. 19, 20.

^k Gal. iii. 29.

^l Col. ii. 6, 7.

buds which promise an abundant supply of fruit. No person, with these objects before him, doubts of their comparative value: no one doubts which of the two better answers the end of all the cultivation bestowed upon it, or which is the more acceptable to him on whose ground they stand. Know ye then, my Brethren, that this is the evidence which ye must give of a work of grace within you. You must, as David speaks, "be beautified with salvation:" the power of divine grace must display itself within you, by all those holy dispositions which were in Christ himself. Behold the Saviour in his whole deportment towards God and man; how meek and lowly; how patient and forbearing; how superior to earthly things, and intent on the work assigned him! "His path was like the sun" in its course: and "such should yours be, shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day:" yea, so clearly and constantly should it shine, that all who behold you should confess that God is with you, and should glorify him for the grace conferred upon you. It is in this way that we are to approve ourselves trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, "in whom he shall be glorified."]

3. To extend the knowledge of him throughout the world—

["No one of us should live unto himself." From the moment that we are engrafted into Christ, we should begin to bring forth fruit to his glory, and should labour to diffuse to the utmost possible extent the benefits we have received. Our domestic circle should occupy our first attention; and then the neighbourhood in which we live: and then we should go on further, to extend our efforts, till we have "filled the face of the whole world with fruit." This should be the ambition of every child of God: and, if facilities are afforded us for combined exertion, we should gladly avail ourselves of them, in order that our labours may be more useful, and that we may effect by union what cannot be wrought by individual exertion. In particular, we should look upon the state of the Jewish and Heathen world. We should lament to see in what darkness both the one and the other are lying: and, like the holy apostles, we should endeavour to advance the Redeemer's kingdom throughout the world. Like St. Paul, we should have great heaviness and continual sorrow in our hearts for those who are "perishing for lack of knowledge;" and, by all the means within our reach, we should labour, that "all the kingdoms of the world may become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ."]

And now, let me further IMPROVE this subject,

1. In a way of reproof to ourselves—

[How little of this piety is to be seen amongst us! Men are “rooted” indeed; but it is in the world, and not in Christ. And there is, to a certain degree, a form of godliness amongst us; but its power is sadly wanting. Nor is there altogether a want of benevolence; but it is displayed rather to the bodies than the souls of men; or, at all events, is exercised only towards those around us, instead of being extended to the whole world. Perhaps we may contribute towards the diffusion of the Holy Scriptures, and the sending of Missionaries to the Gentiles, and to the work that is carrying forward amongst the Jews: but, if we examine how far our hearts are interested in these things, we shall have reason to be ashamed before God, and to acknowledge that we are very far from having attained that holy zeal which should animate our souls. We say indeed, as our Lord has taught us, “Thy kingdom come:” but, as for our efforts for the establishment of it, they are as cold and partial as if the matter were of no importance. I pray you, Brethren, to lay this matter to heart. It is not in this way that our God ought to be served, and our Redeemer’s interests promoted. We should be full of zeal in this sacred cause, even of such “a zeal” as has a tendency to “consume us.” Our very life ought not to be dear to us, if that by any means we may advance the welfare of our fellow-creatures, and the glory of our God.]

2. In a way of encouragement, as it respects the Jews—

[We are apt to entertain desponding thoughts, as if it were impossible that the prophecies respecting that people should ever be accomplished. But is their state more desperate than it was in Egypt or in Babylon? Yet were the promised deliverances vouchsafed from thence. *On the self-same day* that had been foretold four hundred and thirty years before, were they brought out from Egypt; and precisely at the termination of the seventy years from Babylon. What reason, then, is there to doubt of God’s effectual interposition now? Has he forgotten his own word or promise? or, after so many centuries, “is his ear become heavy that he cannot hear, or is his arm shortened that he cannot save?” He has said, “I WILL CAUSE” this: and be assured, that not all the power of men or devils shall prevent the execution of his purpose: nor shall one jot or tittle of his word ever fail.” “Has he said, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” In engaging, then, in this cause, you have this consolation; that, though you should not live to see the work accomplished, it shall take place at the appointed time. The dispersed of Judah shall be brought back to God; and that event shall “be as life from the dead, to the whole world.”]

DCCCXCIX.

CONVERSION OF THE JEWS GRADUAL.

Isai. xxvii. 12, 13. *It shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall beat off from the channel of the river unto the stream of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the Holy Mount at Jerusalem.*

THE conversion of the Jews has till of late occupied a very small portion of attention in the Christian world: and even at this moment a sad indifference towards it too generally prevails. Notwithstanding the prophecies relating to it are so clear, the subject is scarcely ever brought before a Christian audience; and notwithstanding it is inseparably connected with the conversion of the Gentile world, it is overlooked for the most part as an event in which we have no interest. Degraded as the Jews are, God still declares, that “they are beloved of him for their fathers’ sakes:” but by us, who are indebted to their fathers for all the light that we enjoy, they are neglected and despised, as though their souls were of no value. This unconcern for their welfare is even justified by us, from a mistaken notion that God will in some miraculous way effect their conversion suddenly, and without the intervention of human means. But, whilst the prophecy before us serves to correct that error, it encourages us to exert ourselves in their behalf, and to expect that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

In it we see,

I. The mercy reserved for the Jewish people—

That “they shall be gathered” from their dispersion, and “worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem,” is certain: and,

1. It may well be thought that this shall be accomplished *literally*—

[There are even amongst wise and good men some who doubt whether the Jews shall *literally* be restored to their own land; and therefore I would speak with diffidence respecting it: but I confess that in my opinion the declarations of God respecting it are so strong and numerous, that I should scarcely know what to believe on the authority of Scripture, if I did not believe that. I will however content myself with mentioning only two passages; which yet, I consider as clearly determining the point. Moses, in one of his last addresses to the Jews, tells them, that if by their iniquities they should provoke God to drive them out of the land of Canaan, and to scatter them among the nations, yet he would, on their repentance, “have compassion on them, and gather them from all the nations whither they were scattered; yea, though they should be driven out unto the uttermost parts of heaven, even from thence would the Lord fetch them, and bring them again into the land which their fathers possessed; and do them good there, and multiply them above their fathers^a.” This was never verified at their return from Babylon, since they were not brought “from the uttermost parts of heaven,” but almost exclusively from Babylon; nor did they ever afterwards become near so numerous, as they had been under David and Solomon. The other passage to which I will call your attention is taken from the Prophet Zechariah, who wrote after their return from Babylon. Extremely particular is the prophet in stating the populousness and prosperity of the nation at the period of their final return to their own land from their present dispersion: that “old men and old women should dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, every man walking with his staff in his hand for very age, whilst the streets should be full of boys and girls playing in them^b.” If it be inquired what period is there referred to, we are told, that it should be “when ten men out of all languages of the nations should take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you^c.” When, I would ask, was this ever fulfilled? When were the Jews ever so high in favour with all the nations of the earth? At no past period assuredly: but they shall be at a future season, even at that season when God shall interpose to re-establish them in the land from whence they have been driven out. But, however this may be,]

2. It is confessed by all, that it shall be *spiritually* fulfilled—

[The Christian Church is called “Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,” to which all true believers are come^d. And to it shall the Jewish people also

^a Deut. xxx. 1—5.

^b Zech. viii. 3—5.

^c Zech. viii. 23.

^d Heb. xii. 22.

come in due season. Scattered as they now are, and at the utmost possible distance from Christianity, the time is coming, when "the good Shepherd will seek and search them out, and bring them into his fold, and cause them to feed upon the mountains of Israel^e." Then, says God, "I will set up one Shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; and he shall feed them, and be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them: I the Lord have spoken it^f." Let this be compared with what the Prophet Hosea says to the same effect; and no doubt can remain, either respecting whom it is spoken, or at what period it is to be accomplished^g. Were we to take from the Old Testament all the passages which speak to the same purpose, we should transcribe no inconsiderable portion of the prophetic writings. But this is unnecessary, since there is not any one who believes the Scriptures, who does not believe that the Jews shall at a future period be converted to the faith of Christ, and acknowledge him as their Messiah. Yet we must on no account pass over the testimony of St. Paul, who occupies one entire chapter with this subject; assuring us, that there is yet among the Jews "a remnant according to the election of grace^h;" that "they shall again be grafted on their own olive-tree, from which for our sakes (though for their own transgressions) they have been broken off:" and that as their temporary rejection from the Church of God has been the means of introducing the Gentiles into it, so shall their restoration to it be an infinitely richer blessing to the Gentiles than ever their rejection was, being to the whole Gentile world "as life from the deadⁱ."

Regarding then the bestowment of this mercy to the Jews as certain, we proceed to state,

II. The way in which it shall be vouchsafed to them—

This we will trace,

1. In its commencement—

[The extent of territory originally assigned to them in God's covenant with Abraham, was that which is here specified in our text; it was from the river Euphrates to the Nile^k. But, having been driven from thence, they are compared to an olive-tree which has been stripped of all its fruit, except a few that were either hidden from the owner, or inaccessible to him, on the topmost boughs^l. God, however, will send his servants to seek out this scattered fruit, and to "beat it off,"

^e Ezek. xxxiv. 11—14.

^f Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. ^g Hos. iii. 5.

^h Rom. xi. 6.

ⁱ Rom. xi. 12, 15, 19, 20, 24.

^k Gen. xv. 18

^l Isai. xvii. 4—6.

or shake it off, from the tree, in order to gather it for him. The success that will attend their labours will not be great: the Jews will be gathered only, as if it were, "one by one." But to them it will be a joyful event, that they have not been left to be devoured by the birds, but have been collected for the Master's use. This is elsewhere described by the same prophet: "When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, there shall be as the shaking of an olive-tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done: they shall lift up their voice; they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord; they shall cry aloud from the sea^m." To the same effect, God speaks also by the Prophet Jeremiah: "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family (or tribe), and I will bring you to Zionⁿ."

Such will be the effects produced upon the Jews at the commencement of the efforts that shall be made for their restoration to God. As it respects the mass of the dispersed, the first converts will be only a small remnant, a gleaning after the gathering has been made; as the prophet has informed us: "Though the people of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant only shall return^o:" but as it respects the complete in-gathering which shall ultimately follow, they will be as the first-fruits before the harvest, and the drop before the shower.]

2. In its progress—

[In due time "the great trumpet will be blown," and the Jews that are scattered to the utmost ends of the earth shall hear it. The trumpets were, by God's command, to be blown on different occasions; and especially, for the convoking of the people to the tabernacle in the wilderness; for the regulating of their journeys towards the Promised Land^p; and for the proclaiming every fiftieth year the year of Jubilee^q. The Gospel is this trumpet, which will be "sounded out" through the whole world; and it will "come with power and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance^r," to "the outcast Israelites in the land of Egypt, and to those who are ready to perish in the land of Assyria." Then will that be fulfilled which is spoken by the Prophet Jeremiah, "The watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion to the Lord our God. For thus saith the Lord: Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations: publish ye, praise ye, and say, O Lord, save thy people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them from the north

^m Isai. xxiv. 13, 14.

ⁿ Jer. iii. 14.

^o Isai. x. 22.

^p Numb. x. 2.

^q Lev. xxv. 9.

^r 1 Thess. i. 5, 8. and ii. 13.

country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child, and her that travaileth with child, together; a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born^s." &c. &c. — — — "Then shall the Lord set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people from Assyria, and from Egypt," &c.; "and shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth." "And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea, &c.: and there shall be an high-way for the remnant of his people which shall be left from Assyria, like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt^t." Nor shall they come alone from the places of their dispersion; for vast multitudes will accompany them, insomuch, that "Israel shall be only as a third of the whole number, whom the Lord of Hosts will bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance^u." Thus eventually "shall *all* Israel be saved: for this is God's covenant with them, when he shall take away their sins^x."]

3. In its consummation—

["They shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem:" and O what worship will then be offered in every place! the worshippers all so enlightened! (for "the light of the moon will then be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days^y:")) and their experience of heavenly things so deep! for "the knowledge of the Lord will then cover the earth, not in extent only, but in depth also, as the waters cover the sea^z:" and God revealing himself so gloriously in the midst of them! (for then "the sun will be no more their light by day, neither for brightness will the moon give light unto them; but the Lord will be an everlasting light unto them, and their God their glory^a.")) Then will be realized (at least in its incipient state), that vision of the beloved disciple, who says, "I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and

^s Jer. xxxi. 6—14. Quote the whole of this.

^t Isai. xi. 11, 12, 15, 16.

^u Isai. xix. 23—25.

^x Rom. xi. 26, 27. ^y Isai. xxx. 26. ^z Hab. ii. 14.

^a Isai. lx. 19—21. Cite the whole, with suitable remarks.

they shall be his people ; and God himself shall be with them, and be their God^b.”]

SEE then from hence,

1. How groundless is the objection which so many raise against the efforts that are making for the conversion of the Jews, that they are useless—

[Many ask, not with grief and sorrow, but with a kind of malignant triumph, What good have you done ? Your society has now been instituted several years, and what has been their success ? I answer, that no person can reasonably expect to sow and reap on the same day. No other society has prospered at the first moment of its institution. Inquire of missions to the heathen ; Have they prospered all at once ? How much less then can it be expected, that the Jews, with all their deep-rooted prejudices, should in a moment lay them all aside, and, overcoming obstacles greater than can be conceived, become at once the disciples of the despised Nazarene ? But the Christian world have conceived a notion, that the Jews are to be converted all in a day. This however is a mistake. What God may do at a future period I presume not to say. I do myself conceive, that in God's appointed time, when God's servants shall “ prophesy unto them,” and “ the great trumpet be blown” throughout the earth, there will be a resurrection of the dry bones ; and they will rise “ a great army^c.” But this is not to be expected at the first commencement of our endeavours, as you have already heard. We are not taught to expect, in the first instance, more than the gleanings of an olive-tree : and, if we get “ one of a city, and two of a tribe,” and gather them from different places, “ one by one,” we are to account ourselves richly recompensed for our labours. How many, I would ask, did our Lord Jesus Christ, and his twelve apostles, aided by seventy other disciples, convert in the four years previous to the day of Pentecost ? Yet they wrought miracles in confirmation of their word. Was the smallness of their success during that period any ground for saying, that they had lost their labour, and that it would be useless to prosecute their object any further, especially since they must do it at so great a risk to themselves, and to all who should embrace their religion ? Thus then I say, that as many have been gathered as, considering the contracted scale on which the efforts have been used, and the total want of a proper medium of access to them which till lately we have experienced, could in reason be expected. We grant that the converts have hitherto been few, and that yet for a season they may continue

^b Rev. xxi. 2, 3.

^c Ezek. xxxvii. 9, 10.

to be only as slender gleanings; but is this a reason why we should not search them out, and endeavour with care and labour to beat the tree? If a house with only half-a-dozen persons in it should be on fire, and some were exerting themselves for their preservation, what would you think of the humanity of the person who should deride and damp their efforts, from the consideration that they could only hope to benefit a few? Look at the text, and see the description given of the Jews: are they not "outcasts," and "ready to perish?" And is not this a sufficient reason to seek their salvation, though we should save from destruction only "one or two?" They are called "the lost sheep of the House of Israel:" and has not our Lord taught us, that, if there be only one of a hundred gone astray, we should go after that one and seek to bring it home? Yea, has he not in this very connexion told us, that "it is not the will of your Father that one of his little ones should perish?" Should not we then be like-minded with God, and determine, that not one shall perish, through any want of effort on our part to save him? Should we not all unite as one man to carry into effect the purposes of God's love towards them? Is there any hope that the few which invite our labours, shall be gathered in, if there be none to beat or shake the tree? or can there be a general convocation of them to the Lord, if there be none to go forth and sound the trumpet in their ears? Know ye then, that we want instruments, active and zealous instruments, to do the Lord's work: we need pecuniary aid also, that we may send forth missionaries to the ends of the earth, with the Gospel trumpet in their hands, and the love of God in their hearts, to make known to the Jews their Messiah, and to "bring them home as an offering to the Lord their God^e." O that God would stir us all up to seek the welfare of the children of Israel, and make use of *us* to hasten forward the period of their complete redemption!]

2. What we all need in order to our own salvation—

[Let us not, in our zeal for others, forget ourselves. We are all, with the exception of a small remnant, in as bad a state as the Jews themselves. The only difference between us, is, that *they* are ignorant of Christ, but "*we* profess to know Christ, yet in works deny him." As far as respects vital godliness, we are as far from God as they. "All we like sheep have gone astray; and, no less than they, do we need to return to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls^f." It is true of us, as well as of them, that the truly pious are but a remnant. "The god of this world" has the harvest; and the God of

^d Matt. xviii. 12—14. ^e Isai. lxvi. 20. ^f 1 Pet. ii. 25.

heaven nothing but "the gleanings." The Lord's people are but "a little flock;" and in comparison of the multitudes who go in "the broad road that leadeth to destruction," they are but "few" who "enter in at the strait gate, and walk in the narrow path." Forgive me, then, if with holy violence I endeavour to "beat you off" from the tree on which you are yet standing, and to "gather you" for the Lord. Let me sound in your ears the Gospel trumpet, which proclaims "liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;" and let me entreat you to "return (as the remnant will assuredly do) to the living God^g," "to worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem." We must be content, we fear, to "gather you one by one:" for, notwithstanding all the efforts that are made for the restoration of your souls to God, it is a melancholy fact, that we succeed but little better with you in the midst of all your advantages, than we do with the Jews in the midst of all their disadvantages. If we labour ever so much, and can reach only "two or three upon the topmost bough, and four or five upon the outermost bough," we are forced to be content, yea, and to think ourselves well repaid; so little power has the Gospel in the present day, and so sparingly is the Spirit of God poured out upon us. Know this however for your good. Whatever is necessary for the Jews, is necessary for us also. Must they believe in Christ? so must we. Must they give themselves up to him? so must we. Must they walk in his steps, and be conformed to his image? so must we. And sure I am, that the more we experience these blessings in our own souls, the more shall we labour to communicate them to the whole world, and more especially to those for whose sake God has imparted to us the superior blessings we enjoy^h.]

^g Isai. x. 21.^h Rom. xi. 30, 31.

DCCCC.

THE FELICITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

Isai. xxviii. 5. *In that day shall the Lord of Hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty unto the residue of his people.*

THE sublime expressions of Scripture frequently raise in our minds a pleasing sensation, while yet we entertain but very confused notions of the truths contained in them. It is scarcely possible to read the words of the text without being struck with wonder and admiration: but we cannot enter into their full import without a careful attention to the

preceding context. Samaria was the capital of the ten tribes: it was situated on a high hill, and surrounded by fertile vallies, which were skirted with other hills: hence it was compared to a crown or chaplet; which, while it adorned the adjacent country, marked its pre-eminence above all the other cities of Israel. But for the pride and intemperance of its inhabitants, God denounced his judgments against it, declaring that this beautiful chaplet should be “a fading flower,” and this boasted fortress, a desolation. He foretold that its wealth and beauty should but excite the avidity of its enemies, who, as soon as they came against it, should prevail over it, and greedily devour it, as one would devour a delicious piece of fruit which he unexpectedly found hanging on a tree. Then, *to mark as strongly as possible, the contrast between them and his faithful people*, he promises that He himself will be to his people a crown of glory that shall never perish, and a diadem of beauty that shall never fade—

This was fulfilled in the preservation of the two tribes under Hezekiah from the forces of the Assyrians, after they had destroyed Samaria and carried captive the whole kingdom of Israel. But its full accomplishment must be sought for in the blessings which God vouchsafes to his people under the Gospel dispensation. To illustrate it we must observe, that,

I. In the most degenerate times God has a remnant of faithful people—

There has been no season when God has not had some faithful adherents—

[In the antediluvian world all flesh had corrupted their way, and it seemed as if the very remembrance of God had been effaced from the minds of his creatures: but yet there was one small family who maintained their steadfastness, and openly acknowledged the true God. Before God separated the Israelites for himself, the world was again reduced to a state similar to that before the deluge: yet even then there were found an Abraham, a Melchizedec, a Job, and perhaps a few others connected with them. The times of Elijah were extremely degenerate: yet then, though he thought himself the only servant of God in Israel, there were seven thousand others

that had never bowed their knee to Baal. Though therefore the knowledge of God has frequently been almost extinct, yet there never has been a period when he had not some to be his witnesses in the ages in which they lived.]

But at no time has he had more than a little remnant—

[When first the twelve tribes were established in Canaan, piety prevailed among that nation more than at any other period: but there is no reason to imagine that the godly bore any proportion to the ungodly; nor, if their whole nation had been pious, did they bear any proportion to the world at large. There were many converted in the days of the Apostles; and religion flourished far beyond what it ever did before or since that time: yet Christians were even then “like the gleanings of the olive, one or two upon the topmost boughs.” The name of Christ is indeed very widely spread; but if his professed followers be sifted, how little true wheat would be found in comparison of the chaff! Truly it is “a little flock,” “a remnant according to the election of grace;” “though the nominal Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is only a small remnant that will eventually be saved^a.”]

Their state however is peculiarly happy; for,

II. While they honour God, God greatly exalts and blesses them—

The terms used in the text import that God will be to his people a source of,

1. Honour—

[A crown is the highest honour to which a human being can aspire in this world. But how poor and contemptible is such a dignity, when compared with that which God confers on his people! “He is not ashamed to be called their God:” He acknowledges them as “his sons and daughters:” they are the very “members of Christ’s body,” yea, they “are one spirit” together with him. While monarchs are surrounded by their nobles, the saints are attended by holy angels, who, as “ministering spirits, are sent from heaven to minister unto them.” When they go hence they have a crown of righteousness, and a throne of glory on which they shall sit with Christ at the right hand of God, in whose presence they shall “reign as kings and priests for ever and ever.” “Such honour have all his saints.”]

2. Beauty—

[A crown is deemed the brightest ornament to the person that wears it; nor is any thing wanting to it that can increase

^a Rom. xi. 5. and ix. 27.

its splendour. This idea is particularly marked in that a crown is called "a diadem of beauty." But God puts a far brighter ornament around the head of his people: "He beautifies them with salvation." He encircles them, as he did Moses of old, with rays of his own glory, insomuch that "his own glory is seen upon them." A meek and quiet spirit is but a single grace out of many with which they are endued; yet that is "an ornament of great value even in the sight of God" himself; what then must be the constellation of graces that form their character? But what can God himself say more than this, that they are "renewed after his own image in righteousness and true holiness," and that they are progressively "changed into his image from glory to glory by the agency of his almighty Spirit?" Is the ornament of a glittering bauble worthy to be compared with this?]

3. Happiness—

[Men conceive that the possession of imperial honours must of necessity contribute greatly to their happiness: hence, if such a station be within their reach, there is nothing which men will not do to attain it. But supposing that all the satisfaction which men expect from their elevation were invariably attached to it, how much greater happiness does God impart to his chosen people! Their "peace passeth all understanding;" their "hope is full of immortality;" their "joy is unspeakable and glorified." They are not indeed exempt from sorrows; but they have "joys with which the stranger intermeddleth not." No tongue can declare the comfort they sometimes feel in a sense of the divine favour; nor can the heart of man conceive those joys which are prepared for them at the right hand of God.]

4. Security—

[The idea of security attaches to the condition of a king, because, the instant that he is in danger, there are thousands at his command to rally round the throne, and to expose their lives in his defence. But if "the Lord of Hosts himself be our crown," then are we secure indeed. And has he not said that "He standeth round about his people;" that "their place of defence is the munition of rocks^b;" that "He himself will be to them as a broad and rapid river that can neither be passed nor navigated^c;" yea, that "He will be a wall of fire round about them^d," not only to protect their persons, but to destroy all that would invade their peace? Has he not assured us that "neither the power nor the policy of hell shall ever prevail against them?" and that "none shall ever pluck them out of

^b Isai. xxxiii. 16.

^c Isai. xxxiii. 21.

^d Zech. ii. 5.

his hand?" Having HIM, they have all. If "none can separate them from his love," their honour and beauty, their happiness and security, are as firm and immovable as God himself.]

INFER—

1. How desirable is it to be found among the little remnant!

[Look at the greatest monarch upon earth; and the condition of Lazarus is infinitely preferable to his, unless he be among the number of God's people. Created glory, like that of Samaria, is but "a fading flower:" but if we belong to God, we have a portion, substantial in its nature, and everlasting in its duration. Let us then seek this portion with all earnestness through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.]

2. How little should we regard the scoffs and contempt of men!

[It is indeed "a small matter to be judged of man's judgment." If God commend us as wise, we need not be concerned though men should account us fools. Time will shew, who are the truly wise, they who through the love of the world or the fear of man displease their God, or they, who face the frowns of the world, and sacrifice its interests in order that they may please him. Indeed the ungodly themselves will soon alter their sentiments respecting these things^e. And, if a king upon his throne would not regard the ravings of a maniac who should conceit himself to be arrayed in royal majesty, so neither need we regard those who enjoy only the appearance of happiness, while we possess God himself for our crown of glory, and our diadem of beauty.]

3. How are we bound in our respective spheres to honour and glorify our God!

[Can we reflect a moment on such transcendent mercies, and not feel it our duty to walk worthy of them? If any ask, How shall I requite the Lord? We answer, "Be ye a crown of glory and a royal diadem in his hand^f." It is true, we cannot add to his honour, beauty, happiness, or security; but, as a diadem is that on which the prince looks with peculiar complacency, so may we be objects of pleasure and delight in the hand of our God. Let us then endeavour so to walk that we may be his boast: so to shine, that it may be seen to whom we belong; and so to honour him, that he may acknowledge us as his in the day that he shall make up his jewels.]

^e Wisd. v. 3—6.

^f Isai. lxii. 3.

DCCCCI.

THE MILLENNIAL PERIOD FAST APPROACHING.

Isai. xxix. 17. *Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest?*

OUR blessed Lord reproved the Scribes and Pharisees of his day; because when, from particular appearances in the atmosphere, they could judge with considerable accuracy what the state of the weather would be, they could not discern, from the clear evidences before them, that their Messiah was indeed come^a. We will not say that a similar reproof is due to those who see not the near approach of the Millennium now, because the evidences of it are by no means so clear and strong: but I think there is abundant ground for the appeal which the Prophet Isaiah made to the people of his day; “Is it not yet a very little while,” and all the wonderful blessings of the latter day shall overspread the earth?

In confirmation of this sentiment, I will set before you,

I. The event anticipated—

The prediction in my text relates to one great event—

[It is generally supposed to comprehend *two* events; namely, the conversion of the Gentiles, and the rejection of God’s ancient people. But I feel no doubt but that it relates generally to the conversion of the whole world to Christ; and that its true sense is this: “In a little time the uncultivated forest of the Gentile world shall become a fruitful field; and that which would now be reckoned a fruitful field, namely, the Jewish Church, shall be *esteemed as a forest*,” so incomparably more abundant shall its fruitfulness be in the latter day.

This accords best with the very words of my text; for it is not said that the fruitful field shall *be turned into* a forest, (as in the former clause,) but that it “shall *be esteemed as a forest*,” where the diversity of the words clearly marks the diversity of the sentiment contained in them.

This also well accords with the general strain of prophecy,

^a Matt. xii. 28. with xvi. 2, 3.

which abounds in amplification, and, if I may so say, exaggeration. Thus this same prophet, speaking of this same period, says, “Behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth; and *the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind* There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; *but the sinner, being an hundred years old shall be accursed,*” i. e. shall be considered as having died under a kind of judicial sentence, by reason of his being removed at so early an age^b.

This, too, is most clearly marked in the context^c — — — It is also strongly marked in the context in a following chapter; where *the very same words are used, by the same prophet*^d — — — And again the very same event, foretold, though not in the same, yet in *nearly similar terms*, is associated with *the very same identical facts*, expressive of the blessings which shall then abound over the face of the whole earth^e — — —]

In a word; what the prophet here speaks respecting the state of the Church in his day, as compared with that which shall obtain in the latter day, is precisely to the same effect with that which St. Paul speaks respecting the Jewish and the Christian dispensations: “The former had a glory; but the latter far exceeded in glory; so that that which was made glorious had no glory, by reason of the glory that excelled^f.”]

And a most glorious event will this be—

[The whole world, which is like a desolate wilderness, will have the seed of the Gospel cast upon it, and, through the showers of divine grace falling upon it in rich abundance, will bring forth fruit to the praise and glory of our God. We doubt not but that the most savage people upon the face of the earth, who, in point of civilization and knowledge, are at present scarcely superior to the beasts, will, through the preaching of the Gospel, “be turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” And where the light of the Gospel has already come, it will shine with incomparably greater splendour; according as it is written, “The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound^g.” In that day, the prophet tells us, “the people shall be all righteous^h.” “holiness to the

^b Isai. lxxv. 17, 20. ^c Cite ver. 18, 19. ^d Cite Isai. xxxii. 15—18.

^e Isai. xxxv. 1, 2, 5—7. All these passages must be distinctly cited, in order to justify the construction put upon the text, in opposition to Vitranga, Bishop Lowth, &c.

^f 2 Cor. iii. 8—10.

^g Isai. xxx. 26.

^h Isai. lx. 21.

Lord shall be written upon the very bells of the horsesⁱ," that are used in agricultural pursuits; and "all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of the Lord and his Christ^k."]

The appeal made to us respecting this blessed period leads me to shew,

II. The evidence we have of its near approach—

The prophet judged it near in his day—

[So certain and so clear were the views which the prophets had of the events which they were inspired to foretell, that they saw them already accomplished, as it were, before their eyes. "A thousand years were with them but as one day^l." It is now two thousand six hundred years since these events were revealed to the prophet, and yet Jehovah spake of them as if they were already taking place: "Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all as with an ornament, and bind them on thee as a bride doth. Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? And who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone: these, where had they been^m?" So again; "Who are these, that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windowsⁿ?" Now then, if the prophet spoke of this period as so near in his day,]

Much more may we consider it as very near at this time—

[And indeed, besides the lapse of so many centuries, we have much additional evidence of its approach. *The general scope of prophecy*, so far as it designates the period of which our text speaks, points, if I may so say, to this very age in which we live. The one thousand two hundred and sixty years of Daniel are, beyond all doubt, near to their completion: and consequently the reign of Christ on earth, as its universal Monarch, is near to its commencement.

Besides, amongst both Jews and Gentiles there is a *general expectation* that some great change is at hand, and that God will shortly interpose to bring all nations to such an unity in religious faith and practice as has never yet been seen upon earth.

The efforts which are making throughout the whole Christian world for the accomplishment of this object, by translating the Holy Scriptures into the different languages of the earth,

ⁱ Zech. xiv. 20.

^k Rev. xi. 15.

^l 2 Pet. iii. 8.

^m Isai. xlix. 18, 21.

ⁿ Isai. lx. 8.

by sending out missionaries also to instruct both Jews and Gentiles, and by instilling into the rising generation the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. These efforts are altogether unprecedented, both in respect of energy and extent: and, whilst they shew that God is with his people to call forth their exertions, they are a pledge to them that their labours shall not be in vain.

The actual commencement of a work of grace in many places, where nothing but darkness reigned till of late, justifies a hope that we already see the dawn of approaching day, and experience somewhat of the drops that precede the shower^o.]

APPLICATION—

1. Let us look forward with holy earnestness to this blessed time—

[Did Abraham feel such delight in the prospect of our Saviour's first advent! and shall not we, with similar emotions, look forward to the period when he shall come in his glory, and establish his kingdom over the face of the whole earth? — — — Even in heaven is this a ground of joy^p; and much more should it be to us, who hope, “in a very little while,” to participate in all the blessings which he is coming to bestow.]

2. Let us pray to God to hasten this long-wished-for day—

[We are taught to pray, “Thy kingdom come.” And it is in answer to prayer that “God will pour out his Spirit from on high, to effect that change which is promised in our text. It is by the Holy Spirit alone that this change can be wrought^q: and through his almighty power shall Pentecostal conversions be effected, in every quarter of the globe.]

3. Let every one of us, in our place, endeavour to help it forward—

[God has promised that “seed time and harvest shall never cease,” till the end of the world; but it is by the instrumentality of man that he effects his purposes: so also shall the diffusion of divine knowledge, and the increase of fertility throughout the whole earth, be effected by the instrumentality of man^r. But it is not by ministers only that God will pour out these benefits upon us, but by the agency of all who, in their place and station, endeavour to advance his cause in the

^o The state of the Turkish Empire (Dec. 6, 1827), and of Popery, were further touched upon, as *possibly* leading to great results in reference both to the Mahomedan and Popish delusions; the destruction of which is to precede the glory of the Latter Day.

^p Rev. xii. 10—12.

^q Isai. xxxii. 15.

^r Matt. ix. 38.

world. Even in the Apostle's days, females had their department of labour, and laboured too with good success, as well as men^s: and at this time, also, there is a call for the exertions of every soul amongst us: and though we have in ourselves no more power or efficiency than rams' horns, yet will God by us demolish the strong holds of sin and Satan, and establish throughout the world the kingdom of his dear Son.]

^s Rom. xvi. 3, 4, 12.

DCCCCII.

THE GOSPEL A SOURCE OF BLESSINGS TO MANKIND.

Isai. xxix. 18, 19. *In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness: the meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.*

THERE is a day frequently spoken of in Scripture under the emphatical title of "*that day*:" and it sometimes refers to the apostolic age, sometimes to the millennial period, and sometimes to the day of judgment. Commentators in general consider the first of these to be the time designated by that expression in the text. To this they are led by the interpretation of the preceding verse; which they understand thus: "In a very little while, Lebanon (the Gentile world, which has hitherto been a mere desert) shall be turned into a fruitful field (by means of the Gospel which shall be published); and the (hitherto) fruitful field (of the Jewish Church) shall be esteemed as a forest (or desert). And in that day (of the destruction of the Jewish Church and polity) shall the deaf hear the words of the book," &c. &c. But I should rather incline to consider the second period, namely, the millennial æra, as the time intended: because I have no conception of "Lebanon," which is constantly used in Scripture to characterize grandeur and fertility, being applied to designate a mere desert. I apprehend rather that in that verse there is a climax, descriptive of the state of the Church when the Jews shall be gathered into it: that *then* "Lebanon (which now is desolate) shall be turned into a fruitful field;

and the fruitful field (such as it will then exist) shall be esteemed as a forest ;” seeing that “ the handful of corn cast upon the top of the mountains” will spring up so abundantly, that “ *the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon^a.*” This is the kind of climax which often occurs in relation to that very period, It may be seen in chap. lxxv. 20. where it is said, in reference to the protracted age to which men will then live, that “ a person dying at the age of an hundred years will die a mere child, and be accounted as one accursed,” that is, cut off prematurely, under a stroke of judicial vengeance. In chap. xxxii. 15. also, the very expressions of the text are again used in this precise view : “ When the Spirit shall be poured from on high, (it is said,) the wilderness shall be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.” Thus I understand the prophet as saying in our text, that “ *in a very little while*” (it was but a little while even in Isaiah’s days, but now it is just at hand,) the Jews shall be converted to the faith of Christ, in such numbers as to be like the woods of Lebanon; and THEN the poor benighted Gentiles also shall be gathered into the fold of Christ, in a way and to an extent altogether unprecedented from the first publication of Christianity to that very hour.

In this view of the passage it has an equally favourable aspect both upon Jews and Gentiles : on Jews, to shew what blessings are in reserve for them, (and now just about to be poured out upon them;) and on Gentiles, who will by their means experience, as it were, throughout the whole world, “ a resurrection from the dead^b.”

It is not however my intention to insist on this point: but, waving any further notice of the millennial period, I shall simply shew,

I. What is that book to which the attention of all men shall be called—

It is here called “ the book ;” and must undoubtedly be, the book of revelation, in which all “ the visions”

^a Ps. lxxii. 16.

^b Rom. xi. 12. 15.

of the seers, and the predictions of the prophets, are contained. This is the book in relation to which God had poured out upon the Jewish nation a spirit of deep sleep, and had closed their eyes, even the eyes of their prophets, their rulers, and their seers; inso-much that it was altogether as “a sealed book,” which, “whether delivered to a learned or unlearned man,” was equally unintelligible to him^c. So completely were its contents hidden from them, that “the wisdom of their wise men perished, and the understanding of their prudent men was hid^d.”

From the New Testament we are able to speak more definitely on this point, and to say that this book is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: for this is the description which St. Paul gives of the Gospel, in reference to the very chapter before us. He says, that he was sent to preach the Gospel; but that it was to the great mass of his hearers “foolishness:” agreeable to what had been written; “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” “To the Jews,” he tells us, “it was a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but unto those who were called, whether Jews or Greeks, it was Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God^e.” This book contains the “hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world; which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory^f.” Indeed “the natural man, whoever he be, cannot receive it; for it is foolishness unto him: neither can he know it, because it is spiritually discerned,” and can be known only through the influence of God’s Spirit upon the soul^g.

Thus, by comparing the account given of this book by an inspired Apostle, *in reference to the very chapter before us*, we may with certainty declare what book is here intended.

Now, as the Gospel is the book which the deaf are to hear, and the blind to see, it will be proper,

^c ver. 10—12.

^d ver. 14.

^e 1 Cor. i. 18, 19, 23, 24.

^f 1 Cor. ii. 7, 8.

^g 1 Cor. ii. 10—14.

1. To enter a little into its contents—

[It reveals to man a Saviour. It declares that God, in tender mercy to our fallen race, sent his only dear Son into the world, to make an atonement for us, and to effect by his own obedience unto death, our reconciliation with him — — — The Old Testament revealed this as to be effected in due season; and the New Testament gives an account of it as already accomplished — — — The New Testament moreover sets before us all his invitations and promises, together with the promise of the Holy Spirit, to render the whole effectual for our complete and final salvation — — —]

2. To shew briefly, that this is indeed God's destined instrument for the salvation of the world—

[It is that with which he wrought from the very beginning: for, though it was comparatively but obscurely revealed, yet it was to this that Adam looked, as holding forth a promise of the seed of the woman to bruise the serpent's head: and to this the faith of Abel had respect, when he presented the offering of a firstling to the Lord. To this also Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the patriarchs, and all the prophets, and all the saints and martyrs of the ancient Church, had respect: they viewed it through the medium of types and prophecies; and though they had not actually received the promised Saviour, they were saved by him, just as we are who live so many centuries posterior to his advent^h. There never was, nor ever shall be, "any other foundation" for a sinner's hope, or "any other name whereby a sinner can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ."]

Having shewn what "the book" is, we are led to notice,

II. Its transcendent excellency—

It comes to the whole world, and commends itself to all,

1. As suited to their wants—

[It might be thought, that, whatever offers it made, it would be of no use, if men had not eyes to see it, or ears to hear it: but it engages that the deaf shall hear it, and that the blind shall see it out of obscurity and out of darkness. It not only presents to us things suited to our spiritual senses, but it gives us the very senses, whereby we are enabled to apprehend them. Now this is of peculiar importance; for there is no man by nature who has any spiritual discernment whatever: all are both deaf and blind: and, if you imagine that they are exempt

^h Heb. xi. 4, 13, 39, 40.

from the general malady, they only prove the more strongly the universality of this truth. Under these two figures may be comprehended all the necessities of our fallen nature : for as a person who has from his birth been destitute of sight and hearing can possess no intellectual attainments, so those who are by nature cut off from all means of spiritual discernment must be destitute of spiritual good. Yet is there no spiritual good which the Gospel will not impart to those who seek it, because it will give both the blessing itself, and the faculty whereby it is to be enjoyed.

It were well if this matter were more generally considered ; for it would cut off many sources of despondency, by which the people of God are discouraged. Nothing is more common than to consider a want of natural talent as an almost insurmountable obstacle to the attainment of divine knowledge ; and more especially to regard long-contracted guilt as a ground for apprehending an utter exclusion from the hopes of the Gospel. But the Gospel meets the ignorant and the guilty with the same free offers of mercy as are presented to the possessors of learning and morality ; and it takes occasion from their very discouragements to press on them in particular the acceptance of its benefits : “ When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst (a more desperate case can scarcely be painted) ; I the Lord will hear them ; and will open for them rivers of waters in high places (the very reverse of what might naturally be expected), and fountains in the midst of the valleys : I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of waterⁱ. ” Whatever then be any man’s necessities, let him turn the greatness of those necessities into a plea, as David did ; “ Be merciful unto my sin, O God, for it is great ! ” and let him know, that the greater his necessities are, the more will God glorify himself in the supply of them.]

2. As sufficient for their necessities—

[Nothing is wanting to make the Gospel of Christ effectual. Human wisdom can add nothing to the teaching of God’s Spirit. Man’s righteousness can add nothing to the righteousness of Christ : nor can his strength add any thing to the strength communicated from on high. On the contrary, the least reliance on any thing human will invalidate every thing that is divine : for God will do all, and have all the glory, or leave man to his own inadequate and unassisted efforts. Of itself, it is “ quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword ; ” and “ mighty through God to the pulling down all the strong holds ” of sin and Satan. If only it come in

ⁱ Isai. xli. 17, 18.

demonstration of the Spirit and of power, nothing can stand before it. It has already prevailed to a vast extent over the powers of darkness, and in God's good time it shall "subdue all nations to the obedience of faith."

One effect in particular it invariably produces, wherever it is received in spirit and in truth; it imparts "a joy with which a stranger to it intermeddled not." "The meek are they who will receive it; and they will increase their joy in the Lord: and the poor among men, for whose advancement it is pre-eminently designed, shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel." Others may possess carnal joy: but these shall have a joy *in the Lord*, "a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory."]

APPLICATION—

[Why should not "that day" be already come? Whether it be come or not to Jews or Gentiles, there is no reason why it should not be come to you. How blessed would it be to see the commencement of that day amongst you! See what is said of it in another part of Isaiah's prophecies: "*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped*: then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert^k." Dear Brethren, implore help from God: and he will come now at last to give efficacy to his word, and to make it the power of God to the salvation of your souls.]

^k Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.

DCCCCIII.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD RECOMMENDED.

Isai. xxx. 7. *Therefore have I cried concerning this, Their strength is, to sit still.*

NOTHING is more strongly inculcated in the Holy Scriptures than trust in God. Nothing more dishonours him than the want of it: nothing more glorifies him than its unreserved exercise. Not that it supersedes the necessity of exertion on our part: for we are to "work out our own salvation," notwithstanding we know that all our will and power to do so must proceed from God^a. Yet there are occasions whereon we must forbear to act, and simply wait on God to effect for us what we have no hope

^a Phil. ii. 12, 13.

of effecting for ourselves. Such was the occasion before us. The Assyrian monarch was about to invade Judea; and the whole Jewish people were for delivering themselves from his power. This was most displeasing to God, who sent his prophet to inform them, that “the Egyptians should help in vain, and to no purpose. Therefore have I cried,” says he, “*concerning this*; Their strength is, to sit still.”

The prophet, you will see, limits his assertion to that particular occasion: so that the passage requires me to shew,

I. Under what circumstances activity is called for—

Certainly we are, in the general, to be “workers together with God:” more especially,

1. When we have to earn our temporal support—

[Immediately after the Fall, God imposed upon us a necessity to labour for our daily subsistence; saying, “In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread^b.” He also determined what portion of our time should be given to it: “Six days shalt thou labour^c.” In the Gospel he has renewed his injunctions, in the plainest terms: “Labour with thine hands the thing that is good^d.” And, “If any man will not labour neither shall he eat^e.” Even in subordinating our temporal engagements to those which are spiritual, he has shewn that the temporal are not to be neglected. The command, “Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God^f,” implies, that the things of time and sense are to occupy an important measure of our time. And, indeed, on our exertions our temporal prosperity is made to depend: for it is “the diligent hand, and that only, that maketh rich^g.”]

2. When any good works are to be done—

[In reference to them, a state of inactivity would be highly criminal. Our blessed Lord “went about doing good^h,” and he expects that all his people should follow him in this respect: for “he has set us an example, that we should follow his stepsⁱ.” Indeed, our conformity to him in this respect will constitute a very principal subject of his inquiry at the last day, and a sure ground of his decision in the day of judgment^k. We are therefore instructed, expressly, “not to be weary in well-doing^l,” but, “by patient continuance in it, to seek for

^b Gen. iii. 19.

^c Exod. xx. 9.

^d Eph. iv. 28.

^e 2 Thess. iii. 10.

^f Matt. vi. 33.

^g Prov. x. 4.

^h Acts x. 3.

ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 21.

^k Matt. xxv. 34—46.

^l Gal. vi. 9.

glory and honour and immortality^m." We must therefore abound in every good workⁿ;" and, "whatever our hand findeth to do, we must do it with all our might^o."]

3. When the salvation of the soul is concerned—

[That salvation is the gift of God, is no reason why we should neglect to seek it. On the contrary, our Lord says, "Labour for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you". All the images which are used to represent the Christian life imply great exertion on our part. We are to "run a race;" to "fight a good fight;" to "strive for the mastery:" but these things are not done without great exertion: so that, if in the hope and prospect of the heavenly prize, we were to sit still, we should insure to ourselves nothing but shame and loss. No election of God will ever save us, if we do not labour to save ourselves: "We must give all diligence to make our calling and election sure;" and must "add one virtue to another," without any partiality or reserve, if ever we would "have an entrance ministered unto us into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ^q."]

Still, however, there are occasions where it is proper to forbear working, and where "our strength is rather to sit still:" in confirmation of which, I will shew when activity may be suspended, and,

II. Under what circumstances it is to give way to confidence in God—

We may then "sit still,"

1. When, from the nature of the circumstances, activity can be of no avail—

[When God commanded the paschal lamb to be slain, and all the Hebrews to sprinkle their houses with its blood, as the means of averting from them the sword of the destroying angel, to what purpose would they have put forth any efforts of their own? Could they ward off the stroke which inflicted death on all the first-born of Egypt? No: "their strength was to sit still;" and to confide in God, who had promised to deliver them. Again; When the Red Sea was before them, and mountains and morasses were on either side, and the hosts of Egypt in their rear, what could they do to ward off the destruction that menaced them? They were as incapable of resisting Pharaoh, as if they had been already bound in chains before him. Their only hope was in God, who opened a way for them through the sea; and made that, which was a path to them, a grave to all their foes.

^m Rom. ii. 7.

ⁿ 2 Thess. ii. 17.

^o Eccl. ix. 10.

^p John vi. 27.

^q 2 Pet. i. 5—11.

Now the same line of conduct becomes us also, in reference to the redemption of our souls. God says to us, "Christ, your passover is sacrificed for you^r:" sprinkle yourselves with his blood: rely on that for protection: and, though the curses of my law are following you, and all the powers of darkness are combined against you for your destruction, "yet shall you not perish, but have everlasting life^s." If we will comply with this, our salvation is sure: but if we will have recourse to any efforts of our own, our doom is sealed: for we may as well hope, by our own power, to create a world, as by any works of ours to remove our guilt, and to obtain for ourselves the felicity of heaven. "We must be saved by faith, and not by works^t." Any attempts to save ourselves by works will only invalidate what Christ has done for us^u. Every endeavour, therefore, of this kind must for ever be relinquished: our whole strength, in relation to this matter, is only to "sit still."

2. When no means can be used, but such as are unlawful—

[To Rebekah it had been promised, whilst her twin children, Esau and Jacob, were yet in her womb, that the "elder should serve the younger^x." But when Isaac, to all appearance, was dying, he called for Esau, in order to confer on him the honours and privileges of his birth-right. Rebekah, who had a partiality for her younger son Jacob, seeing this, and fearing that he would lose the honours which God had promised him, and having no prospect of turning Isaac from his purpose by any representations or remonstrances of hers, proposed and executed a most iniquitous device; by which she brought on herself and family a long series of afflictive dispensations^y. She should on no account have interposed to effect her wishes in such a way as this; but have placed her confidence in God, who was at no loss for means to accomplish his own decrees. Means were proposed to Daniel and the Hebrew Youths to avert the calamities with which they were menaced; but they acted as became them, and experienced from God the aid for which they relied upon him^z. And thus it becomes us also, when menaced by our enemies, to "cast our care on God^a." We are not, because of any conspiracies against us, to cry with desponding apprehension, "A confederacy, a confederacy! but to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, and to make *him* our fear, and *him only* our dread^b." We are never to betake ourselves to dissimulation, or any unworthy methods of deliverance; but to wait the Lord's leisure, and assure our-

^r 1 Cor. v. 7.

^s John iii. 16.

^t Eph. ii. 8, 9.

^u Gal. v. 2, 4.

^x Gen. xxv. 23.

^y Gen. xxvii. 1—46.

^z Dan. iii. and vi.

^a 1 Pet. v. 7.

^b Isai. viii. 12, 13.

selves that “in the mount of difficulty he will be seen^c.” The direction to all the Lord’s people is, “He that believeth, shall not make haste^d.”]

3. When personal exertion will take the matter out of God’s hands—

[We admire the conduct of David, who, in his conflict with Goliath, would take nothing with him but a sling and a stone. Here, not in word only, but in deed also, he shewed where his trust was, even in God, who had assured him of the victory^e. On the other hand, King Asa, though on the whole a pious monarch, brought on himself the displeasure of the Most High, because “in a time of sickness he sought to the physicians rather than to his God^f.” He was not to blame for applying to the physicians, as God’s instruments for his relief: his fault was, in relying on their skill, rather than on God’s power and grace. It is not every use of means that violates the rule that is here prescribed: they may be used, if they are used simply as means: but our trust must be as entirely on God as if no means whatever were employed. The Apostles were directed, when brought before kings and governors for the Gospel sake, to “take no thought what they should say, in defence of themselves, or of the Gospel which they preached: they were told, that, in the precise time of need, they should be instructed by God what they should speak^g.” *That* was necessary, in order to shew that they spake not of their own minds, but by inspiration of God. But if ministers, in their stated services, without any such call from God, were to neglect to prepare for their public addresses, they would only tempt the Lord; who authorizes none to “offer to Him that which costs them nothing.” After all our preparation, our reliance must be on Him, “who alone can give the increase, even though Paul should plant, and Apollos water.” The true distinction is, that “in the spirit of our minds” we are to sit still, whether we use any means or not: and, when God’s agency will be more seen and known and acknowledged, and his glory be thereby the more advanced, then we are to forbear the use of means altogether, or only use them as the prophet did the lump of figs, to heal in Hezekiah a fatal disorder^h.]

Let me now ADD,

1. A word of caution—

[Doubtless this doctrine is open to abuse. In truth, there are many, who, when urged to seek after God for the salvation

^c Gen. xxii. 14.

^e 1 Sam. xvii. 39—47.

^g Matt. x. 19, 20.

^d Isai. xxviii. 16.

^f 2 Chron. xvi. 12.

^h 2 Kings xx. 7.

of their souls, will say, ‘I have no fear; I trust in God.’ But it is a desperate delusion to say, ‘I trust in God,’ when they use not the means which God himself has appointed for the attainment of the end. What would these persons themselves think of a man who should say, ‘I trust in God for an harvest,’ whilst he neglected to plough and sow his field? Yet this man would act as rationally as theyⁱ. Be it so, that all depends on the election of God: but, if we are “elect of God the Father, it is through sanctification of the Spirit, and through sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ^k.” The means are ordained, as well as the end: yea, the end is ordained *by* and *through* the means: and if we will not go to Christ to “sprinkle our consciences with his blood,” or apply to the “Holy Spirit to sanctify” our souls, we shall in vain hope to attain the end. I warn you therefore, Brethren, not to “pervert the Scriptures to your destruction^l,” but to seek that conformity to them, in all things, which God requires.]

2. A word of encouragement—

[To you at this day, no less than to his people of old, does God say, “In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength^m.” And is not this sufficient for you? Whom did God ever forsake? Who that ever trusted in him was confounded? Is he not the same God now as ever he was? “Is his arm shortened, that he cannot save? or is his ear heavy, that he cannot hear?” The tempest-tossed disciples were rebuked for entertaining a fear, when Jesus was embarked with themⁿ, though they had no specific promise in relation to that particular storm: but ye have promises which relate to every danger to which a human being can be exposed. “Know then in whom ye have believed, that He is able to save that which you have committed to him^o.” and, under the darkest circumstances that can ever be imagined, “be strong in faith, giving glory to your God^p.”]

ⁱ Gal. vi. 7, 8.

^k 1 Pet. i. 2.

^l 2 Pet. iii. 16.

^m ver. 15.

ⁿ Matt. viii. 24—26.

^o 2 Tim. i. 12.

^p Rom. iv. 20.

DCCCCIV.

BENEFITS ARISING FROM GOD'S RETURN TO THE SOUL.

Isai. xxx. 26. *Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound.*

THE dispensations of Providence, if rightly improved, are calculated to promote our spiritual welfare.

The Jews derived many instructive lessons from the dealings of God with them in Egypt and the wilderness. But God here promises them more abundant knowledge and joy by means of their deliverance from the Assyrian host^a. The grandeur, however, of the words before us evidently shews, that the prophet had respect to more distant times, and to blessings which no temporal deliverance was able to convey. We must say of this promise,

I. That it is verified amongst us at this day—

It is fulfilled to us,

1. At the first reconciliation of our souls to God—

[The convictions of an awakened conscience are as deep wounds to the soul. Sin, though it be honey in the mouth, becomes gall in the stomach: Peter, Judas, and David in particular, shew what "*wounds*" it will make in the soul^b; nor can any one view it aright, without having his heart broken with a sense of its malignity.

But reconciliation with God heals these wounds. The blood of Christ is that "*balm of Gilead*," which never was applied in vain^c. It operates as the sight of the brazen serpent on the dying Israelites, to restore to life and vigour those, whose state seems altogether desperate^d. David, after the foulest transgressions, declared his persuasion of its efficacy to cleanse even him^e. And all who are reconciled to God through Christ experience its full effects^f.

Now this is a season wherein the knowledge and joy of the soul are much enlarged. Till this great event is accomplished, the views of the soul are very contracted; nor is it acquainted with any joy but what is carnal: but no sooner has this taken place, than the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines into the heart, and all his perfections are admired and adored. Now also the excellency of the Gospel salvation is discovered; and the reasonableness of a life devoted to God is deeply felt. Now is a new and inexhaustible source of happiness opened to the soul: and its peace and joy flow down like a river; and all the pleasures that it ever enjoyed in the ways of sin, are no more in comparison of its present consolations, than the faint "*light of the moon*" to the invigorating rays of the meridian "*sun*." But this promise has a further accomplishment,]

^a That this is the literal import of the passage appears from ver. 31. compared with ver. 25, 26.

^b Ps. xxxii. 1—6.

^c Jer. viii. 22.

^d John iii. 14, 15.

^e Ps. li. 7, 8.

^f Luke iv. 18. 1 Pet. i. 8.

2. At any return of God to the soul after a season of darkness and desertion—

[God finds it necessary sometimes to hide his face from his people, and thus to wound their souls afresh. How the loss of God's presence afflicts a pious soul, may be seen in the lamentations and complaints which the most eminent saints have uttered on such occasions. Job tells us, that God's arrows stuck fast in him, and that the poison of them drank up his spirit^g. And David even "roared for the disquietness of his heart." Nor are there wanting at this day many whose experience accords with the description which that eminent saint has given of his^h.

But the return of God binds up this breach. The deliverance from such a state is compared by our Lord to the joy that succeeds the pangs of childbirthⁱ: nor can its effects upon the soul be more fitly represented than in the language of the Jews on their return from Babylon^k.

And this also is another season of peculiar instruction and comfort. By this the soul obtains much deeper discoveries of its own corruptions^l; and more encouraging views of God's power and faithfulness^m: the depths of Satan's devices also are more clearly discerned, and, if its joys are less ecstatic than before, they are more pure and refined. The still fuller accomplishment of the text will take place,]

3. At the hour of dissolution—

[God never entirely withholds his chastening rod in this world. The whole of this life is a state of discipline——But at death there is an end of every thing that is penal or painful. Whatever wounds may have pained us here, death will heal them allⁿ——

Then will this promise be fulfilled in its utmost extent. What amazing discoveries will be made to the soul on its first dismission from the body! And with what inconceivable raptures will it be transported, as soon as ever it shall enter the gates of heaven! Whatever it may have heard of the blessedness of the saints, it will surely say, that not a thousandth part had been declared to it. Then shall those descriptions given by the prophets all be realized^o. As for the joys it experienced below, they shall appear as nothing in comparison of those it will then possess. What the saints tasted here was through the medium of ordinances, and mixed with frequent sorrows, and, at best of short duration; but what they possess in heaven will be immediate, unmingled, and everlasting.]

^g Job vi. 4.

^h Ps. xlii. 3, 4, 6, 7, 9.

ⁱ John xvi. 21.

^k Ps. cxxvi. 1—3.

^l Job xlii. 5, 6.

^m Isai. xxv. 1, 4.

ⁿ Rev. xxi. 4.

^o Isai. lx. 19, 20.

But the true import of the promise leads me to shew,
 II. That it shall hereafter be more abundantly verified
 amongst God's ancient people—

They shall be healed of their wounds at a period
 not far distant—

[Certainly "their breach" is grievous, and "their wounds" are to all human appearance "incurable." So has God himself declared^p. *Nevertheless* God in due season will surely "restore health to them, and heal them of their wounds^q." Through the preaching of the Gospel shall this blessed consummation be effected^r, and happiness shall be restored, not to that nation only, but through them to the whole world^s — —]

And oh! what light and joy and holiness will then abound!

[Methinks, when it is said that "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea," we must understand it as predicting not the *extent* only of divine knowledge, but its *depth* also, and the blessedness arising from it: "the light of the moon will then indeed be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, as the light of seven days;" yea "the moon shall be confounded, and the sun itself ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and before his ancients gloriously^t." This is beyond all doubt to be accomplished in due season; "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away^u." Of the extent of their knowledge in that day, and the fulness of their joy, we at present can form scarcely any conception. What surprising views will they then have of the whole mystery of redemption, when they shall see all the prophecies fulfilled, and all the types and shadows realized in the person and work of Christ! Of that season, no less than of heaven, it is said, "The city will have no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God will lighten it, and the Lamb be the light thereof. And there shall be no night there; and they need no light of the sun: for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever^x."]]

APPLICATION—

^p Jer. xxx. 12—15.

^q Jer. xxx. 16, 17. The word *therefore* should here be translated "nevertheless."

^r Jer. xxxiii. 6.

^s Jer. xxxiii. 7—11. with Rom. xi. 12, 15.

^t Isai. xxiv. 23.

^u Isai. xxxv. 10.

^x Rev. xxi. 23—26. and xxii. 5.

1. Let us look forward then to that blessed period—

[We need not be distracting our minds, and the minds of others, with curious questions about the precise *manner* in which Christ and his saints will reign: still less is it expedient to dogmatize upon this matter, as some are doing at this day: but we should look forward to it with holy joy, and expect it with most confident assurance: and the 98th Psalm should express the habitual frame of all our minds^y — — —]

2. Let us seek the foretaste of it in our own souls—

[Why should we rest satisfied with low measures of holiness or of joy, when it is our privilege to “rejoice in Christ with joy unspeakable and full of glory^z?” We are not contented with the light of the moon, when we can have the light of the sun, nor are we satisfied with the sun in its early dawn, when we can enjoy it in its meridian height. Let us, then, extend this desire to all spiritual blessings, and never be satisfied, till we are as holy and as happy as God himself can make us.]

^y Ps. xcvi. 1—9.

^z 1 Pet. i. 8.

DCCCCV.

GOD THE PROTECTOR OF HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. xxxi. 4, 5. *Thus hath the Lord spoken unto me, Like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, he will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the Lord of hosts come down to fight for Mount Zion, and for the hill thereof. As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it.*

THE first of the commandments is, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” And that is directly violated, when we alienate from God the confidence that is due to him alone, and place it on any creature in preference to him. This was the sin which the prophet reprov'd, both in this and the whole foregoing chapter. Sennacherib, King of Assyria, had come against Jerusalem with a powerful, and, humanly speaking, irresistible army. Many of the Jews, instead of looking to Jehovah for his gracious and merciful protection, applied to Egypt for help, and carried

their wealth to Egypt, in order to obtain it. God, offended with this want of confidence in him, sent them word, that the Egyptians should help in vain, and to no purpose; and that their real strength was, to sit still, and to rely on God alone^a — — — If they would with real penitence and faith rely on him, He would afford them speedy and effectual deliverance. This assurance God delivered to them under the different images which are contained in my text; which shew, not only what God would be to them, but what he will be to his Church and people in all ages of the world.

Let me, with a special view to these images, point out to you,

I. The protection which God will afford to his people—

We are told, that, “as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth even for ever: and that they who trust in him shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever^b.” But, as the emergency that existed at the time the prophet uttered my text was extremely urgent, so the images by which he was directed to encourage their affiance in him were precisely such as were suited to the occasion. God promised to protect them—

1. With the firmness of a lion—

[A lion, growling over his prey, regards not the shouts of a multitude of shepherds: unmoved himself, he infuses terror into them; and would soon make them repent of their temerity, if they dared to approach him. And who shall prevail on Jehovah to relinquish his defence of Jerusalem? In reference to the Assyrian army, which God was determined to destroy, the prophet says, “The Lord of Hosts hath purposed; and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out; and who shall turn it back^c?” The same also we may say in reference to the weakest of all his saints: “If God be for you, who can be against you^d?” “Who is he that shall harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good^e?” God is not only a tower of defence to his people to preserve them, but “a wall of fire

^a Cite Isai. xxx. 1—7; and compare it with ver. 1—3.

^b Ps. cxxv. 1, 2.

^c Isai. xiv. 24—27.

^d Rom. viii. 31.

^e 1 Pet. iii. 13.

round about them," that shall devour their assailants^f. He may indeed suffer the enemies of his people to prevail for a season; and they may vaunt, as the Assyrians did, of all their conquests: but they are only as a rod in Jehovah's hands; and all which they effect is only as the axe or saw that accomplishes the will of him who uses it: but when they have effected his purpose, they themselves, who sought nothing but to gratify their own ambition, shall be made monuments of his righteous indignation: "The light of Israel will be to them for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day^g." Yes, verily, "God's counsel shall stand, and he will do all his will^h:" and "when He works, who shall let it?" "The Lion of the tribe of Judah^k" shall assuredly prevail, though all the powers of earth and hell were combined against him.]

2. With the tenderness of a parent bird—

[A bird, though utterly unable to cope with a bird of prey which it sees hovering over its nest, will fly to protect its young; and, insensible to its own danger, will intercept its potent adversary, and rather perish itself than give up its offspring to the devourer. And, "for our miseries is Jehovah grievedⁱ;" yea, in all our afflictions, too, our God himself is afflicted^m:" and whosoever "toucheth us, toucheth the apple of his eyeⁿ." When Pharaoh had overtaken the Hebrews at the Red Sea, "the pillar of fire, which had hitherto led the fugitives, went and stood between the Egyptian camp and them; so that they came not near to his people all the night," during which period an opening was made for their escape^o. And in ten thousand instances has God interposed for his people in every age; nor is there any one, who, if he could review all the dealings of God towards him, might not find, in his own experience, some interpositions fully answerable to the image that is before us.]

3. With the success of the attendant angel—

[At the destruction of the Egyptian first-born, Jehovah, the Angel of the Covenant, accompanied the destroying angel; and, wherever he saw the blood of the paschal lamb sprinkled on the door-posts, immediately interposed, and constrained the destroyer to pass over that house: in remembrance of which marvellous deliverance, a feast was instituted, and was called "The Feast of the Lord's Passover^p." To that the prophet, in my text, refers; saying, that "Jehovah, passing over Jerusalem, will preserve it." Now, so effectual was the Lord's

^f Zech. ii. 5.

^g Isai. x. 5—7, 12—17.

^h Isai. xlv. 10.

ⁱ Isai. xliii. 13.

^k Rev. v. 5.

^l Judg. x. 16.

^m Isai. lxiii. 9.

ⁿ Zech. ii. 8.

^o Exod. xiv. 19—21.

^p Exod. xii. 23, 27.

intervention in that instance, that, whilst in every other house, throughout all the land of Egypt, the first-born both of man and beast was slain, in the houses of the Hebrews died not so much as one^a. And, when was so much as one true believer ever left to perish? We are expressly told, that "it is not the will of our Father that one of his little ones should perish^r." No: however sifted his people be, "not the smallest grain shall ever fall upon the earth^s." Behold the Apostle Paul: no less than forty persons had bound themselves, by an oath, to murder him: and so well were their plans laid, that there did not appear the slightest chance for his escape. But God so ordered it, that Paul's own nephew overheard the plot, and, by a timely mention of it to the governor, defeated it: and thus was that valuable life preserved^t. Peter too, according to all human appearance, was consigned to death, there being only a few hours to elapse before he was to be brought forth from prison for execution. But with irresistible power did God cause the irons, with which his servant was bound, to fall off; and the prison doors to open, as it were of their own accord: and thus was the stroke averted in the very instant that it was about to fall^u. What dangers have awaited us, we shall never know till we stand before our God in judgment: but then it will be found, that God has been our shield from numberless assaults; and that, through the agency of his holy angels, we have "been kept, on ten thousands of occasions, from dashing our foot against a stone^x."]

Such being the security promised to us, let us consider,

II. Our duty resulting from it—

This merciful care, which God vouchsafes to us, doubtless calls for corresponding feelings on our part. If he affords us such marvellous protection, we ought to surrender up ourselves to him in a way of,

1. Affiance—

[The fault of the Hebrews was, that they leaned on an arm of flesh, instead of relying solely upon God. And we must be on our guard against this sad propensity. We are "not to say, 'A confederacy, A confederacy,' with them that say, 'A confederacy;' but to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, and to make Him our fear and Him our dread^y." The language of David should, under any emergency whatever, be the language of our hearts: "Shall I lift up mine eyes unto the

^a Exod. xii. 29, 30.

^r Matt. xviii. 14.

^s Amos ix. 9.

^t Acts xxiii. 12—24.

^u Acts xii. 6—11.

^x Ps. xci. 11, 12.

^y Isai. viii. 12, 13.

hills (to any earthly powers)? From whence then cometh our help? Our help cometh from the Lord, who (is not only above them all, but made them all, yea,) made heaven and earth^z." It is not possible for our confidence in God to be too strong, provided we leave to God the time and manner of fulfilling his promises. He may, as he did in the case of Jerusalem, suffer matters to proceed to the greatest extremity: but "the vision will come at its appointed time^a:" and, in a full assurance that it shall not tarry beyond that time, we should say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him^b." The well-known boast of the Apostle should be ours^c— — — And in dependence upon God, we should hurl defiance on all our enemies, even as Hezekiah was taught to do in the very depth of his extremity^d.]

2. Gratitude—

[“ If the Lord had not been on our side, now may Israel say, If the Lord had not been on our side when men rose up against us, they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us: then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul^e.” Never, till all the wonders of God’s love shall be revealed, shall we have any idea of the deliverances that have been vouchsafed unto us, and of our obligation to God on account of them. “ Satan, that subtle adversary, who beguiled our first parents in Paradise, has, on thousands of occasions, sought to draw our minds from the simplicity that is in Christ^f,” yea, “ as a roaring lion, also, he has been seeking to devour us^g.” And is it owing to our own wisdom or strength that we have not fallen a prey unto his teeth? No: the Lord has interposed to screen us from his fiery darts; and has again and again rescued us from the snares which he had laid for our feet. See how David was kept from shedding blood^h, and Peter from utter apostasyⁱ! and who can tell what evils you might have perpetrated, and what your state might have at this moment been, if God had not “ kept you as the apple of his eye,” and “ borne you, as on eagle’s wings,” throughout this dreary wilderness^k? I tell you, Brethren, that his visible interpositions for his people of old have been only shadows of what he has invisibly done, and is at this moment doing, for you, if only you place your trust in him: and that David’s acknowledgment is that which it becomes every one of you to make: “ The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall

^z Ps. cxxi. 1, 2. Bishop Horne’s translation.

^a Hab. ii. 3.

^b Job xiii. 15.

^c Rom. viii. 35—39.

^d Isai. xxxvii. 22.

^e Ps. cxxiv. 1—4.

^f 2 Cor. xi. 3.

^g 1 Pet. v. 8.

^h 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

ⁱ Luke xxii. 31, 32.

^k Deut. xxxii. 10, 11.

help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him¹."]

3. Fidelity—

[Believing in God, we have nothing to fear, and nothing even to think of, but how we may best serve and honour him. St. Paul, when in daily expectation of a cruel death, said, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may but finish my course with joy, and fulfil the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus^m." And I would ask, of all who believe the declarations in my text, Should not such "love constrain you to live unto your God?" Realize the determination which he formed from all eternity, and from which not all the wickedness of our ruined world has ever been able to divert him, to save our souls from death by the sacrifice of his only dear Son in our stead. Realize the merciful interposition of the Lord Jesus Christ between us and the wrath of our offended God, and his actually becoming a curse for us. Realize his dying in our place and stead, and by his own obedience unto death effecting a reconciliation for us, and purchasing for us all the glory of heaven. Realize, I say, the deliverances shadowed forth by those vouchsafed to Jerusalem, and spiritually fulfilled in you; and what, think you, will be your feelings on the occasion, or your expression of them? Will there be any bounds to your love, any limits to your obedience, any intermission to your songs of praise? No: you will be "ready either to be bound or to die for His sake," who has "so loved you, and given himself for you:" and "you will be satisfied with no attainment, till you shall awake up after the likeness of his perfect righteousness^o."]]

¹ Ps. xxxvii. 39, 40.

^m Acts xx. 24.

ⁿ 2 Cor. v. 14.

^o Ps. xvii. 15.

DCCCCVI.

SECURITY AND COMFORT IN CHRIST.

Isai. xxxii. 2. *A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.*

THERE is no greater blessing to a nation than a well-ordered government. The due administration of justice, together with the protection of our person and property, afford to any people a just ground of joy and thankfulness. Such a government did God promise to the Jews under Hezekiah; but a greater than Hezekiah

is here. Under the figure of an earthly monarch, Christ is promised; and the text informs us,

I. What blessings we enjoy in and through Christ—

The metaphors, though four in number, suggest but two ideas:

1. Security—

[We have very little conception of winds and tempests in this climate. But the wind that rent the mountains before Elijah^a, and the tempest that desolated the land of Egypt^b, may serve to shew us how welcome a secure place must be to one who is exposed to such formidable dangers. Yet no storms on earth can fully paint to us the dangers to which we are exposed by reason of sin^c. But the Lord Jesus Christ affords us perfect security from them all. In him we have a Goshen where no hail can come, a mountain which the wind can never affect. The billows, which shall overwhelm the whole creation besides, shall not be able to destroy us. In Christ, we have an ark that can never perish.]

2. Comfort—

[We, in this quarter of the globe, know as little of excessive drought and heat, as of overwhelming storms and tempests. But the state of the Israelites in the wilderness^d, and of Jonah at Nineveh^e, may aid our conceptions. How delightful was the gourd to *him*, and how reviving to *them* were the streams that gushed from the rock! And does not a soul oppressed with sin or persecution, or fainting with desire after righteousness, experience as much distress as they? Behold then the preciousness of Christ! He will be not only as a shade or as water to the weary and thirsting soul, but as “rivers of water” that can never be exhausted, and a “shadow of a great rock” through which the beams of the sun can never penetrate. Many can attest his excellency in these respects. Nor shall any who seek refuge in him be ever disappointed of their hope.]

But as these things are spoken of Christ as “a man,” it will be proper to shew,

II. How we enjoy them in him as “a man”—

Christ is truly and properly God, but he is God manifest in the flesh; and it is to him as incarnate that we stand indebted for these blessings.

1. As man, he died for our sins—

^a 1 Kings xix. 11.

^b Exod. ix. 23—25.

^c Ps. xi. 6.

^d Exod. xvii. 2, 3.

^e Jonah iv. 8.

[To his atonement we owe all our hopes of salvation. If he had not expiated our guilt we could never have obtained mercy. If he had not purchased for us the gift of the Holy Ghost, we never could have mortified our inward corruptions. But through his death we are freed from the apprehensions of wrath; and through his Spirit we are filled with righteousness, and peace, and joy^f. Hence our song will ever be, To him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and honour^g.]

2. As man, he intercedeth for us in heaven—

[As our peace was effected by the death of Christ, so is it maintained by his intercession. Now it is as man that he appears in the presence of God for us; and liveth on purpose to carry on this part of his priestly office. By virtue of this, our persons and services find acceptance with God, pardon is given us for our renewed transgressions, and strength is imparted to surmount our manifold temptations. Hence is our salvation justly ascribed, and *that* in a very peculiar manner, to his intercession for us^h.]

3. As man, he is our Head and Representative—

[Christ is the second Adam, the Lord from heavenⁱ. Our life is now treasured up in *him*, that it may no longer be exposed to the assaults of our great adversary^k. It has pleased the Father that in *him* should all fulness dwell; and that out of his fulness all should receive, who shall ever be partakers of his grace, or of his glory^l. Whether we want wisdom to guide us, righteousness to justify us, or sanctification to make us holy, we must look for all of it in and through Christ. As in Adam, our first covenant-head, all died, so in Christ, our new covenant-head, shall all be made alive^m.]

4. As man, he shall judge the world in the last day—

[All judgment is committed to him because he is the Son of manⁿ. And what can tend more to our security and comfort than this? Will He, who shed his blood for us, give up what he has so dearly purchased? or He who both interceded for us, and supplied our wants, consign us over to perdition? Will he not rather bear testimony in opposition to our fierce accuser, and own the work he had wrought both for us and in us? Doubtless, if we should feel a degree of security and comfort in having a very dear friend for our judge on earth, much more may we rejoice in having for our judge in the last day, him who bought us with his blood and renewed us by his Spirit.]

^f Rom. xiv. 17.

^g Rev. i. 5.

^h Heb. vii. 25.

ⁱ 1 Cor. xv. 45, 47.

^k Col. iii. 3.

^l John i. 16.

^m 1 Cor. xv. 22.

ⁿ John v. 27.

We do not mean to exclude his Godhead from this great work of redemption: it is that which gives efficacy to all which he did and suffered as man. But nevertheless it is as man, that is, as the God-man, that we feel our relation to him, and have access unto him as our sympathizing friend.

INFER—

1. What objects of pity are they who have no interest in Christ!

[They are exposed to all the wrath of a sin-avenging God: And where, where will they flee for safety? Where will they even procure a drop of water in that land of drought and misery, to which they shall be banished? Alas! there is no protection but in this city of refuge; there is no water but in this fountain. O that men would consider what they shall do in the day of their visitation; and flee for refuge to the hope that is now set before them!]]

2. How highly privileged are they who believe in Christ

[They are not exempt from occasional distress either of soul or body, but they have an almighty Friend to whom they can carry their distress: they go to him when heavy-laden; and find rest unto their souls. They feel themselves secure in their blood-sprinkled dwellings. But their privileges will not be fully seen till the last day. Then how happy in having a covert from the wrath that overwhelms the ungodly world! Then to have their Saviour both for their witness and their judge! Let us all cleave to him with full purpose of heart; and desire to know him more and more as “our friend and our beloved.”]

° Heb. vi. 18.

DCCCCVII.

THE WORK OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IS PEACE.

Isai. xxxii. 16, 17. *Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.*

THROUGH the introduction of sin into the world, man was altogether despoiled both of holiness and happiness: and the design of God in sending to us his Gospel was, to restore both the one and the other to

our fallen race. This in a former chapter is set forth under the image of the brute creation, which, having through the fall of man been reduced to a state of the greatest disorder, shall be restored once more to universal harmony and peace. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox: and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den: they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea^a." In the passage before us the same truth is set forth under a different image, namely, that of the vegetable creation; which, having been reduced to the condition of a wilderness through the curse inflicted on it, shall be rendered fruitful, even beyond the most fertile parts of Palestine in the most fruitful seasons.

That the passage really relates to the times of the Gospel, does not admit of doubt. In the beginning of the chapter it is said, "Behold, a King shall reign in righteousness; and princes shall rule in judgment: and a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land^b." A season indeed of great desolation should intervene between the prophecy and its accomplishment^c: but at the appointed time "the Spirit should be poured out in such abundance from on high, that the wilderness should become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be so productive as to be counted for a forest."

In my text the metaphor is explained: and we are told in plainer terms what shall be,

I. The character of Gospel times—

^a Isai. xi. 6—9.

^b ver. 1, 2.

^c ver. 9—14.

By “judgment and righteousness,” I understand not merely that which is called justice between man and man, but universal holiness. And this will certainly characterize the Gospel dispensation—

[This is evident *from the very metaphor before us*. In other parts of this prophecy the metaphor is yet further opened and explained. Thus in the 35th chapter it is said, “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose: it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon: they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God For in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert And an high-way shall be there, and a way; and *it shall be called the way of holiness*: the unclean shall not pass over it; but *the redeemed shall walk there^d*.” The change itself also is described in appropriate terms: “Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off^e.” The works of the flesh are here contrasted with the fruits of the Spirit: and it is declared, that these latter shall abound on the face of the whole earth; and that, “as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations^f.”

This is yet further evident *from the universal testimony of Scripture*. If we look into the Old Testament, we find the prophet Ezekiel describing that period thus: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh: and *I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes*; and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them^g.” In the New Testament the same thing is continually declared. Even before the birth of our Saviour, Zacharias, speaking of him as about to visit and redeem his people, represents the end of his advent as being to “deliver his people out of the hands of their (spiritual) enemies, *that they may serve him without fear in righteousness and holiness* before him all the days of their life^h.” And St. Paul assures us, that “the grace of God which

^d Isai. xxxv. 1, 2, 6, 8, 9.

^e Isai. lv. 13.

^f Isai. lxi. 11.

^g Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

^h Luke i. 67—75.

bringeth salvation, was designed to teach us, that, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world*¹.”]

But it is not the occasional existence, so much as the abiding habit, of holiness, which is to distinguish this day—

[“Judgment is to *dwell*, and righteousness to *remain*,” in this our field. At all times, and under all circumstances, piety is to prevail. We are to be “fruitful in *every* good work^k, and “filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God^l.” Our blessed Lord told his disciples, that he “had ordained them that they should go and bring forth fruit, and that their fruit should remain^m,” and through the whole world are they to be distinguished as “a holy nationⁿ,” “a peculiar people zealous of good works^o.”

Now it is greatly to be desired, that this distinction should be visible amongst us. But, if a heathen were directed by this mark to find the Gospel ministered in its purity, would he fix on *us*, on us individually, on us collectively, as possessing that inestimable treasure? Would he, if he followed us to our respective places of abode, and beheld the whole of our deportment through the day, and witnessed our spirit and temper under circumstances of trial, would he say, “That is the garden of the Lord, and those are the trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, in which he is glorified^p?” — — — O Brethren, look well to this matter, and take care that you “shine as lights in a dark world, holding forth the word of life,” not by your profession merely, but by the whole of your conduct and conversation^q.]

That you may be encouraged to these exertions, consider,

II. The fruit of Gospel experience—

“The fruit of righteousness is peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.” To this also the whole Scripture bears witness: and it is confirmed by fact also, that happiness is the inseparable companion of true piety. It is an attendant on piety,

1. As the natural result of holy habits—

[A man cannot commit sin, but he will find it sooner or later productive of pain. He may roll it as a sweet morsel

¹ Tit. ii. 11, 12.

^k Heb. xiii. 21.

^l Phil. i. 11.

^m John. xv. 16.

ⁿ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^o Tit. ii. 14.

^p Isai. lviii. 11. and lxi. 3.

^q Phil. ii. 15, 16.

under his tongue for a moment; but it will prove the gall of asps within him. There is no exception to that truth, "The way of transgressors is hard." But there is not a grace which can be exercised that does not tranquillize the mind. All imaginable graces, whether towards God or man, may be resolved into the one principle of love: and how sweet that is, we need not to observe: it carries its own evidence along with it. In truth, this is the very thing asserted in our text; "The fruit of righteousness *is* peace:" peace is the odour which that holy ointment invariably diffuses; as the Psalmist has said, "*In* keeping God's commandments there is great reward."

If it be thought that the duties of penitence and self-denial are rather of a painful nature, we appeal to all who know what penitence and self-denial are, Whether they have not found an exquisite joy in penitential sorrow, and a more lively satisfaction in the exercise of self-denial, than in all the gratifications which sin could possibly administer? We say again, without fear of contradiction, that there is no exception to this rule.]

2. As bringing with it the testimony of a good conscience—

[This is a source of unspeakable comfort: "Our rejoicing is this," says the Apostle, "the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world^r." It will not unfrequently happen that our principles and conduct may be misinterpreted; so that we may incur blame on account of those very things, which, if rightly viewed, would have entitled us to applause: but, if we have a consciousness that we have really endeavoured to fulfil the will of God, we shall not lay much to heart the obloquy that is cast upon us, but shall say with the Apostle, "It is a small matter to be judged of you or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self: but he that judgeth me is the Lord^s." In the hour of death more especially will peace and assurance fill the soul of one who has truly and unreservedly devoted himself to God. Not that he will be trusting in a well-spent life as meritorious in the sight of God, or as able to justify him at the bar of judgment: no man who knows any thing of the Gospel can entertain such a delusive hope as that; for the whole Scriptures testify that Christ alone is the foundation of a sinner's hope, and that no man can be accepted of God but through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus: but still a consciousness that we have truly lived to God and for God, in holy obedience to his commands, will be to us an evidence of the truth of our faith, and the sincerity of our love; and will inspire us with confidence in reference to the future judgment: for St. John

^r 2 Cor. i. 12.

^s 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

says, "Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall *assure* our hearts before him: for if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things: but if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God^t." And hence we may say to the whole world, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace^u."]

3. As being honoured with tokens of God's special approbation—

[God will "manifest himself unto his people as he does not unto the world." He will "shed abroad his love in their hearts;" and by the immediate influences of "his Spirit bear witness to, and with, their spirits, that they are his children." He will "seal, as it were, their souls unto the day of redemption," and give them already "the earnest and foretaste of their eternal inheritance." But who are these favoured people? Are they those who live in a neglect of holy duties, and in the commission of any known sin? No: "If any man regard iniquity in his heart, the Lord will not hear him^x;" much less will he favour him with such communications as these. But "of his children, who keep his law, great shall be the peace^y," even "a peace that passeth all understanding:" "they shall go forth with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before them into singing; and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands^z."]

LEARN then from hence, Brethren,

1. How to approve yourselves Christians indeed—

["By their fruits ye shall know them," says our blessed Lord: and again, "Bring forth much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples:" "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." You well know that it is in this way that you form your estimate of a field, or of a tree: and this is the only true way of estimating your own character. Your professions are of no value, any further than the truth of them is attested by your practice. You may say, Lord, Lord, with as much confidence as you will: but, if you do not the will of your heavenly Father, Christ will disown you, and cast you from him at the last day. You may now so resemble the wheat amongst which you grow, as not to admit of being easily distinguished from it by a human eye, or separated from it by a human hand. But in the last day the tares and the wheat will be infallibly separated from each other; the one for the fire of hell, the other for the granary of heaven^a. I say

^t 1 John iii. 18—20. ^u Ps. xxxvii. 37.

^x Ps. lxvi. 18.

^y Isai. liv. 13. Ps. cxix. 165.

^z Isai. lv. 12.

^a Matt. xiii. 28—30, 40—43.

then, bring yourselves to this test : and never be satisfied with any faith or any profession, that does not approve itself genuine according to the standard of God's unerring word.]

2. How to be happy in your own souls—

[It is not any earthly gratification that can make you happy. Our Lord does not say, Blessed are the rich, the gay, the respected; but, "Blessed are the humble, the pure, the meek, and those who are even persecuted for righteousness' sake^b." We grant, that this is far from according with the sentiments of the world at large; but it is not the less true on that account. They who have never sought for happiness in God, can have no idea of the happiness that is to be found in him. But the more any one knows of the world, the more will he see that "Vanity and vexation of spirit" is written upon every thing that is in it. Seek not then your happiness, beloved, in "broken cisterns that can hold no water, but seek it in the Fountain of living waters^c," even in Him who is a source of blessedness to all his people^d. Then shall you here enjoy "a full assurance of hope," whilst you live^e; "have an abundant entrance into heaven" when you die^f; and sit down for ever "at the right hand of your God, where there is fulness of joy for evermore^g."]

^b Matt. v. 3—12. Luke vi. 20—26.

^c Jer. ii. 13.

^d Ps. xxxvi. 9.

^e Heb. vi. 11.

^f 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

^g Ps. xvi. 11.

DCCCCVIII.

THE USE AND EXCELLENCY OF TRUE WISDOM.

Isai. xxxiii. 6. *Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the Lord is his treasure.*

THIS is spoken respecting Hezekiah, king of Judah. His country had been invaded by Sennacherib, king of Assyria, by whom all the fenced cities of Judah had been taken. To arrest his course, and to save Jerusalem itself, Hezekiah sent to implore forgiveness for having rebelled against Sennacherib (to whom King Ahaz had made the kingdom tributary), and to declare his readiness to submit to any terms which the conqueror should impose. A very heavy contribution in silver and gold, amounting to above 266,000*l.*, was exacted of him; and he was constrained to send "all the silver that was found in the House of the Lord and in the king's house, and to cut off the gold from

the doors of the Temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which he himself had overlaid," in order to satisfy the demand^a. Having thus paid the tribute, he hoped for peace. But Sennacherib soon violated his engagement; and, setting aside the treaty, sent his servant against Jerusalem, with an immense army, to besiege it^b. No hope now remained to Hezekiah, but from God himself; to whom he applied in fervent prayer^c. And, on that occasion, the Prophet Isaiah, who had joined with him in crying unto God, was inspired to denounce against Sennacherib this judgment: "Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee! When thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee^d." This was speedily and literally fulfilled: for a hundred and eighty-five thousand of Sennacherib's army being slain by an angel in one night, the remainder of them broke up the siege and retreated, leaving a great quantity of spoil behind them: and Sennacherib himself, on his return home, was "murdered by his own sons, whilst he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god^e." Thus did prayer effect what all the wealth of Hezekiah was unable to accomplish: and the reformation made amongst his subjects procured for him what all his armies had in vain endeavoured to effect—a complete deliverance from his powerful and victorious enemies: "Wisdom and knowledge, accompanied with real piety, became to him the stability of his times, and the strength of salvation: and the fear of the Lord was his best and most effectual treasure."

Now, from this passage I will take occasion to shew the influence of true wisdom: First, As promoting the stability of an empire: and, Secondly, As advancing the prosperity of the soul.

I. Consider wisdom as promoting the stability of an empire—

^a 2 Kings xviii. 13, 16.

^b ver. 17. ^c 2 Chron. xxxii. 23.

^d ver. 1.

^e Isai. xxxvii. 36—38.

By "wisdom and knowledge" we are not to understand what we generally comprehend under the term "science;" for we do not apprehend that the Jewish nation, at that time, or indeed at any time, made any great proficiency in that species of learning. By "wisdom and knowledge" is meant a conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God; a wisdom inseparably connected with "the fear of the Lord." This appears from the preceding verse, where it is said, "The Lord is exalted; for he dwelleth on high: *He hath filled Zion with judgment and righteousness*: and wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the Lord is his treasure." Indeed, it may be doubted whether what we call learning and science do at all *necessarily* advance the *stability* of an empire. They are doubtless of very extensive use to an empire, in a variety of views: but they are capable of great abuse; and, if separated from religion, may lead to the overthrow, as well as to the establishment, of an empire; as the recent history of a neighbouring kingdom has evinced. But the knowledge of which my text speaks, is a security to a kingdom. That "knowledge" is thus described by the Prophet Jeremiah: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth ME, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord^f." This explanation of the terms necessarily leads our minds to God as reconciled to us in the Son of his love: for it is in Christ Jesus alone that "the loving-kindness" of God has free scope for exercise towards fallen man; or indeed can be exercised at all, consistently with the demands of "righteousness and judgment:" and it is this knowledge alone which generates a filial "fear" in the heart of man.

^f Jer. ix. 23, 24.

Now, of this “wisdom and knowledge” it may be justly affirmed, that it tends to the stability of every empire in which it is found. So far as it prevailed at any time in the Jewish State, (for it was revealed to them, though darkly, in their ceremonial law,) they prospered: and whenever it was banished, they were delivered up into the hand of their enemies; as their whole history very clearly shews. The separation of the ten tribes, which proved such a permanent and fatal calamity to the whole nation, was appointed of God as a punishment for that iniquity which Solomon had introduced, and which had overspread the whole land. On the other hand, in consequence of the reformation introduced by Hezekiah, (which gave, as it were, for a time, a new character to his people,) the Prophet says, “Their place of defence shall be the munition of rocks; bread shall be given them, and their water shall be sure^g ;” yea, “the Lord will be to them as a place of broad rivers and streams, wherein can go no galley with oars, neither can gallant ship pass thereby^h ;” that is, whilst they were protected by the river, they should be inaccessible by vessels of any kind, the waters being too tempestuous for smaller boats, and too full of rocks and shoals to be navigated by larger ships; and thus, in the midst of hostile nations, should “Jerusalem be a quiet habitation, and a tabernacle that not all the power of their most inveterate enemies could moveⁱ.”

True it is, that we, at this day, are not to look for such *visible* interpositions of the Deity as were vouchsafed to the Jews under what we may call their Theocracy. But God is still the Governor of the Universe, and does still deal with his people, *in a measure*, as in former days; punishing or protecting them, according as their iniquities are flagrant, or their piety profound. And I cannot but think, that though, for our abounding iniquities, God sorely chastened our nation in the last war, the prayers of thousands in this land prevailed to avert from us a vast pressure of calamity, to which all the rest of Europe

^g ver. 16.^h ver. 21.ⁱ ver. 20.

was exposed. Certain I am, that "true wisdom and knowledge" have a proper tendency to promote our national welfare : as it is said, "Righteousness exalteth a nation ; but sin is the reproach of any people^k." Mere science may be associated with every thing that is evil : but piety, so far as it is true and genuine, will diffuse, through all ranks of people, a due attention to their respective duties, calling forth from Rulers equity and benevolence, and generating amongst subjects the habits of industry and content. Formed as human nature is, we cannot expect these things to be universal : but I hesitate not to say, that, in proportion as piety is the predominant feature of any people, there will be among them a patriotic ardour for the benefit of the community, and a simultaneous effort for the promotion of it.

But, to bring the matter more home to our own business and bosoms, I proceed to observe,

II. That "wisdom and knowledge, when attended with a fear of the Lord," will advance the prosperity of the soul.

"The fear of the Lord" is an essential part of true wisdom : as the Psalmist has said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom^l." And this is indeed "a treasure," an inestimable treasure, to every one that possesses it : it is, in fact, a mine of wealth, of *intellectual* wealth, of *moral* wealth, of *spiritual* wealth, and of *eternal* wealth.

It is a source of *intellectual* wealth. However this wisdom may, by many, be reputed folly, and considered as an indication of a weak mind, it most assuredly enlarges the understanding, and elevates its possessor above his fellows ; yea, and above others also, who in natural capacity, and in literary attainments, are far his superiors. If we set before us two persons, one illiterate, and the other versed in arts and sciences, we should suppose, of course, that there can be no comparison between the two in point of intellect : and this is true, so far as arts and sciences are concerned ; but let the weaker of them be

^k Prov. xiv. 34.

^l Ps. cxi. 10.

imbued with divine wisdom, and actuated by the fear of God, and he will have a far juster apprehension of all the things of time and sense than the man of learning has ever attained. David says, "I have more understanding than all my teachers; for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts^m." The mere worldly man, in his estimate of things, keeps eternity out of view: no wonder, therefore, that he "calls evil good, and good evil; and puts darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitterⁿ." But the man who is taught of God has learned to view things in their true light, even as God himself views them; and he speaks of them in accordance with the representation given of them in the inspired volume. The principle of piety which is implanted in his soul has corrected and rectified his judgment: and if the conversation of these two men, the learned and the unlearned, each with his fellows, for the space of one hour, were recorded, we should be perfectly amazed at the mass of error contained in the one; whilst truth, with perhaps scarcely any mixture of error, pervaded the other. In fact, if the most learned of unregenerate men were, in his daily conversation, to betray as much ignorance of philosophical truth as he does of moral and religious truth, he would, to say the least, stand very low in the estimation of all who knew him: so true is that declaration of our blessed Lord, that "God has hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes^o." I again therefore say, that the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus is that which alone deserves the name of "wisdom;" and that all other knowledge, though, in reference to earthly things, of the highest value, is yet, in reference to heavenly things, no better than learned folly; as the Scriptures have most pointedly declared: for it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe?

^m Ps. cxix. 98—100.ⁿ Isai. v. 20.^o Matt. xi. 25.

where is the disputer of this world? *Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*^v ?”

But next, this knowledge is a mine of *moral* wealth. A man imbued with divine “wisdom” has within himself an entirely new standard, whereby to judge of morals, and to regulate his life. Previous to the enlightening of his mind by the Spirit of God, and to his acquaintance with God as reconciled to him in Christ Jesus, he was satisfied with refraining from outward acts of sin: he took little notice of his inward inclinations: he thought little of the sensual look, or the angry word; though God himself tells us, that in his estimation, the one is adultery, and the other murder. He made little account, also, of what the Apostle calls “spiritual filthiness^a,” such as, pride, envy, discontent, covetousness, and the whole list of corruptions that reside chiefly in the soul. In a word, he was ignorant of the extent of the moral law, which requires a perfect conformity to God’s mind and will in every thing. But now he can be satisfied with nothing less than a perfect transformation into the divine image. He longs to “mortify the whole body of sin:” and his one continued labour through life is, to “put off the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts; and to put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness^r.”

Now, then, compare him with the unregenerate man in this respect also; and say whether he is not greatly enriched by his heavenly knowledge, and this fear of God? If it be true that man by sin was impoverished at first: then it is also true, that every man is *enriched* in proportion as he is *sanctified*. We may instance this in one single disposition, “a meek and quiet spirit;” respecting which I am authorized to affirm, that, in the sight of God, “it is an ornament of *great price*^s.” Our Lord compares such graces to “gold tried in the fire;” and declares the possessor of them to be truly “rich^t.” We say, then,

^p 1 Cor. i. 19, 20.

^a 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^r Eph. iv. 22—24.

^s 1 Pet. iii. 4.

^t Rev. iii. 18.

in reference to all such *moral* attainments, that they are a rich “treasure;” since “godliness, with contentment, is *great gain*”^u.

I may further add, that this wisdom is a mine of *spiritual* wealth. Here I must bespeak your candour; because, in bringing forth “the deep things of God^x,” I may be led into a field not commonly explored by the great and learned^y. But, without entering into this view of divine wisdom, I cannot do justice to my subject. I observe, then, that “the fear of God” opens, if I may so say, a new world to him in whom it is found. To speak of God as giving to his redeemed people a *new sense*, would doubtless be erroneous: for the spiritual man has no new faculty, but only a new application and use of the faculties he before possessed: but the Spirit of God, at the time of our conversion, *does* bring new objects to our senses; and enables us, *through faith*, to discern things which are altogether hid from the carnal man^z. Nor let this appear strange. We all know the power of glasses to bring to our view things which, on account of their diminutiveness or distance, are incapable of being clearly discerned by our unassisted organs. We know, too, the power of light, which can render even the motes in the air visible to the naked eye, yea, and visible to one man, whilst they are hid from another who is close at his side. Now, such is the power with which the Spirit of God invests us, when he imparts to us “a spiritual discernment^a.” He brings to the eye of our minds “Him who is invisible^b;” and reflects such a light upon spiritual objects, as to give us a clear apprehension of them, and to make us as certain of their existence as if we beheld them with our bodily eyes. For instance, the man who is truly taught of God, sees God himself upon his throne as a reconciled God and Father; and beholds also the Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of God, perpetually interceding for him. He apprehends, also, the love of God beaming in the Saviour’s

^u 1 Tim. vi. 6.^x 1 Cor. ii. 10.^y 1 Cor. i. 26—28.^z 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10, 14.^a 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10, 14.^b Heb. xi. 27.

countenance; and “comprehends it too, so far as a finite creature *can* comprehend it, in all its breadth and length, and depth and height^c.” By the Holy Spirit, also, he is enabled to realize in his soul those divine impressions, “a spirit of adoption,” “the witness of the Spirit,” “the sealing of the Spirit,” and “the earnest of the Spirit;” and by means of these impressions, he feels “the love of God shed abroad in his heart,” and is filled with “a peace that passeth all understanding,” and “a joy that is unspeakable and glorified.”

I am aware that I have here entered upon ground untrodden by the natural man, and therefore unknown to him, and despised by him. But “among them that are perfect,” as the Apostle says, “we speak wisdom; not indeed the wisdom of this world, but the wisdom of God in a mystery,” which yet is “revealed to all whom God instructs by his Holy Spirit^d.” And now, I ask, What “treasure” in the universe can be compared with this? What is all earthly science in comparison of this? It is only as the twinkling of a star when compared with the splendour of the noon-day sun. This is well called “a treasure hid in a field:” to purchase which, every wise man will part with all that he possesses in the world^e.

But we can never appreciate this wisdom aright, till we regard it as putting us into the possession of *eternal* wealth. We are told, that “godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come^f.” Its value, if this world alone were considered, would be inestimable: but when eternity is taken into the account, “its riches are absolutely unsearchable;” so that if all the angels in heaven were to exert their powers, they would never be able to compute them. Who shall say what it is to be admitted into the presence of the Most High; to behold the Saviour face to face; to participate his throne, and to be joint-heirs of his glory? In attempting to bring before

^c Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^d 1 Cor. ii. 6, 7, 10.

^e Matt. xiii. 44.

^f 1 Tim. iv. 8.

you such a subject as this, we only “darken counsel by words without knowledge.” But all the glory and felicity of heaven are ours, if only we truly fear God. Indeed, God himself tells us, that “his delight is in them that fear him.” And what, I would ask, shall be done to those whom God delights to honour? Not even the angels around the throne are so blest as they whom the Saviour has washed in his own blood, and clothed in his own righteousness, and “presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy^g :” for the saints are represented as standing immediately around the throne of God ; whereas the angels are placed in an exterior circle round about the saints^h. And well it may be so, since the angels have but the righteousness of a creature ; while the saints are clothed in the righteousness of Emmanuel, their redeeming God. I need not ask what the wisdom of this world can do for us in comparison of this ? In the view of these things, it is mere “foolishnessⁱ.” It may edify and exalt us in this world ; but it can do nothing for us in the world to come.

Enough, I think, has now been said to elucidate my text ; and to shew, that that “wisdom” which brings in its train “the fear of God” is the richest of all “treasures ;” and that, though a man possess nothing else, “in having *that*, he really possesses all things^k.”

And now permit me to recommend this wisdom to your special attention. For the attainment of it, all our noble institutions were formed, and especially those which were established by our pious Founder^l. And certainly our advantages, for the prosecution of it, are exceedingly great. Our freedom from earthly cares, and our seclusion from the world, afford us valuable opportunities for the acquisition of self-knowledge, and the knowledge of our God. Let us only be convinced that the pursuit of these is “wisdom,” and that the possession of them is “treasure,”

^g Jude, ver. 24.

^h Rev. vii. 9—11.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iii. 19.

^k 2 Cor. vi. 10.

^l Preached at the Commemoration in King’s Chapel, on March 25, 1828 ; the first Founder’s Day after the opening of the new Hall.

and we shall have reason to bless our God for the peculiar benefits which we here enjoy. Let me not, however, be thought to undervalue science. I am far from wishing to detract from its merits. It is, as I have before said, of exceeding great value, both to the State, and to the person enriched by it. It has in the world a just pre-eminence above rank or wealth, and deservedly raises the possessor of it in the estimation of all around him. It is not the man of splendid title, or of great estate, that stands high in the esteem of his countrymen; but the man who, by his wisdom and knowledge, is enabled to explore the depths of philosophy, and to instruct mankind in the different departments of learning and science. I therefore would earnestly press upon my auditors, a diligent prosecution of knowledge in all those branches which are held in repute amongst us, and which administer to the improvement both of ourselves and others. But yet, as God, without intending to depreciate the sacrifices which he had enjoined, says, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice;” so, without intending to disparage human learning, I would say, “Wisdom, divine wisdom, is the principal thing: therefore get wisdom; and with all your getting, get understanding^m.” Follow David in this respect: “One thing have I desired of the Lord,” says he, “which I will seek after, even that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his templeⁿ.” And, if for this you are called to make any sacrifice, learn from St. Paul to say, “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord^o.” I would further say, Spare no pains for the attainment of this knowledge. We well know what labour many endure in the prosecution of earthly knowledge; and shall we do less for the attainment of that which is divine? Nor let us be satisfied with a superficial view, and a slight experience, of these things; but rather, whatever we

^m Prov. iv. 7.ⁿ Ps. xxvii. 4.^o Phil. iii. 7, 8.

may have attained, let us, with St. Paul, “forget the things which are behind; and reach forth unto those that are before, and press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus^p” We have enemies, greater than Sennacherib, to withstand, and difficulties greater than Hezekiah’s to overcome. We have to combat the world, the flesh, and the devil: but the principle which prevailed in Hezekiah will prevail in us; and the victory which awaited him awaits us also, if we will betake ourselves to God in prayer, and place all our confidence in him alone. “Wisdom and knowledge shall be the strength of salvation” to us; and we shall be “more than conquerors through Him that loved us.”

And well may such a victory be expected of us. We have long been, through the munificence of our Founder, and are now become, in a more especial manner, elevated to a very high degree of celebrity through the splendour of our outward appointments. Why, then, should we not be alike distinguished for our eminence in those *moral* excellencies which he wished us to aspire after; and which we are bound, by every consideration of gratitude and of duty, to display? He sought not to make us rich in this world, but “rich towards God:” and by the competence he has provided for us, he has cut off all excuse as arising from the pressure of conflicting duties. The world, then, may well expect this at our hands. And does not God expect it also? It is He, in fact, who has brought us hither, and invested us with these advantages. Yea, he has done infinitely more for us: he has given us his only-begotten Son, “who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be *rich*^q.” Let us seek, then, “*the true riches*,” even those which Christ has purchased for us on the cross, and which he freely offers to us in his Gospel. We must all admit, that these treasures have had but little attraction hitherto in our eyes, and that we have sadly misimproved the

^p Phil. iii. 12—14.

^q 2 Cor. viii. 9.

talent committed to us. But henceforth let us awake to our duty, and no longer hide our talent in a napkin. Let us remember, that “where much has been given, much will be required;” and that if we labour not for these riches, we only deceive our own souls: for “where our treasure is, there will our heart be also.”

DCCCCIX.

PROTECTION PROMISED TO THE GODLY.

Isai. xxxiii. 16. *He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.*

WE cannot judge of men's moral state by the dispensations of God's providence towards them. Among the Jews indeed virtue was inculcated and enforced chiefly by temporal sanctions; and their national prosperity or adversity bore a very manifest reference to their national conduct. In some degree also the same observation will extend to individuals among them. But to us, under the Gospel, God has not bound himself to distinguish his favourites by any temporal advantages. Nevertheless, what the pious Jews enjoyed visibly in relation to their bodies, that the obedient Christian shall enjoy invisibly in his soul.

To enter properly into the subject before us, we must consider,

I. The character to whom the promise is made—

This appears clearly in the two preceding verses; in one of which it is implied, and in the other it is clearly expressed:

1. He is sincere in his profession of religion—

[The greater part of the Jews were “sinners in Zion, and hypocrites;” and they had good reason to tremble for their approaching calamities. The person spoken of in the text is placed in direct opposition to them: he really belongs to Zion, and to Zion's God: he does not make religion a cloak for habitual and indulged lusts; or profess what he does not experience: if he implore mercy as a “miserable sinner;” and declare his trust in the mere “mercy of God through Christ Jesus;” and desire “that he may henceforth live a sober,

righteous, and godly life, to the glory of God's holy name," he does not mock God with unmeaning words, or hypocritically assume a character which belongs not to him: he feels in his heart what he utters with his lips; and desires to fulfil his duties in Zion, as much as to enjoy her privileges.]

2. He is consistent in the practice of it—

[He has learned in a measure that important lesson, "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good^a." The whole tenour of his conversation is agreeable to the strictest rules of righteousness. In all his dealings he is both just and honourable, not taking advantage of the ignorance or necessities of others, but endeavouring to do as he would be done unto. Nor is he less observant of his words than of his actions: he not only "walketh righteously," but "speaketh uprightly:" he rigidly adheres to truth, and avoids every deviation from it, whether in criminating others, or exculpating himself.

As he thus "cleaves to what is good, so he abhors that which is evil." Could he gain ever so much by an act of oppression, or were he offered ever so great a bribe to bias his judgment and to violate his conscience, he would "despise the gain," and "shake from his hands the polluted gift" with utter abhorrence. Were he advised to do any thing injurious or vindictive, he would "stop his ears" with indignation, and not allow the thought for one moment to dwell upon his mind. Did a contaminating object present itself to his view, or any thing whereby his own corruptions might be stirred up, he would "shut his eyes," even like holy Job, who "made a covenant with his eyes that he would not look upon a maid^b."

We say not that the Christian is never drawn aside through the influence of temptation and corruption; (for then where shall we find a Christian upon earth?) but if at any time he be overtaken with a fault, he returns to God with deepest humiliation and contrition, and renews his course with increased vigilance and circumspection.

That this is indeed the character to whom alone the promise in the text is made, is evident from parallel passages in the Psalms^c, and from the strongest possible declarations in the New Testament^d. O that all persons, whether professors of religion or others, would duly consider this! Our conduct must be upright towards God and man: we must embrace the religion of the Gospel with sincerity, and adorn it by a holy conversation: nor can a person of any other character than this have any part or lot in the promises of God.]

Let us now turn our attention to,

^a Rom. xii. 9.

^b Job xxxi. 1.

^c Ps. xv. 1—5. and xxiv. 3—5.

^d 1 John iii. 6—10.

II. The promise itself—

To understand this, we must consider the occasion whereon it was delivered. The Assyrian army, that had overrun almost the whole of Judea, were now encompassing Jerusalem. The wicked Jews are given up to terror and consternation; but the righteous are encouraged with a promise of,

1. Protection—

[A fortress situated on an eminence which no weapons can reach, and founded on a rock which no human efforts can shake, may be considered as impregnable. Such a place should Jerusalem be to God's obedient people.

To us, who are surrounded with spiritual enemies, the promise has a spiritual import. "The archers will shoot at us:" the world, the flesh, and the devil will combine against us to destroy us: but the true Christian "shall dwell on high," out of their reach; and "his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks" which cannot be undermined. If his enemies wound his body, they shall "not be able to kill his soul;" for *that* is "hid with Christ in God:" and he may say to his enemies, as Hezekiah said to the besieging and blaspheming General, "The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee^e."]

2. Provision—

[There are but two ways in which a fortress, which will not capitulate, can be taken; namely, by assault or famine. Against both of these God promised to guard his obedient people: for as their fortress should be impregnable, so it should be supplied with manna from heaven, and with water springing out of the rocks on which they dwelt. To us also the promise may be applied with strictest propriety. Our enemies may deal with us as with Paul and Silas of old, who were cruelly scourged, and thrust into an inner prison, and their feet were made fast in the stocks: but, though there was no access to them for earthly friends, were the visits of their God intercepted? Could their supplies of strength and consolation be cut off? Did not rather their consolations abound as their afflictions abounded? Thus it shall be with us: "bread shall be given us" for the support of our souls, and "the Holy Spirit shall be *within us* a well of water, springing up" for our continual refreshment. Difficulties and dangers we may experience; but they shall issue only in the confusion of our enemies, and in brighter discoveries of God's power and grace.]

^e 2 Kings xix. 21.

ADDRESS—

1. To those who rest in presumptuous hopes—

[The wicked Jews laughed at the judgments of God when they were at a distance, but were filled with horror at their approach, and cried out, “Who shall dwell with the devouring fire? who amongst us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” Similar consternation will ere long seize on those who now slight the threatenings of the Gospel. The day of vengeance is hastening on apace, and God will then shew himself to be “a consuming fire^f.” How will his enemies then stand appalled^g! How “will they cry to the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb^h!” How terrible will the devouring fire then appear! How awful those everlasting burnings in which they will be doomed to dwell! Let the “sinners in Zion,” the people who name the name of Christ without departing from iniquity, awake from their delusions; let “the hypocrites” also deceive themselves no longer. Let a holy fear possess all our souls: let us cry out, as on the day of Pentecost, “What shall we do to be saved?” and let us improve the present season of God’s mercy and forbearance in “fleeing from the wrath to come.”]

2. To those who are agitated with unbelieving fears—

[Many spend their time in anxious inquiries, Will God save me? Well would it be if we would leave God to do his part, and mind only our own. *God’s part is, to save us: ours is, to serve and glorify him.* This is obvious in the passage before us, and in numberless other passages of Holy Writ. We have nothing to fear but sin. Let us be sincere in embracing the Gospel, and consistent in obeying it, and we need not fear the united attempts of men and devils. God is engaged to be the God of his believing and obedient people: and, “if he be for us, who can be against us?” He will “hide us in his pavilionⁱ,” where we shall be surrounded with hosts of angels for our guard, and supplied with the richest viands for our support: and “in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh us^k.” Let us then dismiss our unbelieving fears, and look to him to “fulfil his promises, wherein he has caused us to put our trust.”]

^f Heb. xii. 29.^h Rev. vi. 15—17.^k Ps. xxxii. 6, 7.^g Ps. lxxiii. 19.ⁱ Ps. xxvii. 5.

DCCCCX.

THE CHURCH'S SECURITY.

Isai. xxxiii. 20—22. *Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities : thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down ; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams ; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby. For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king ; he will save us.*

IN times of national calamity or danger, if we do not immediately see the means of our preservation, “our hearts are apt to meditate terror,” and to tremble even for the ark of God. But, though we ought to mourn for the desolations of Zion, and to desire its prosperity, we may safely leave the concerns of the church to him who has founded it on a rock, and who is incessantly engaged for its defence. God may purge his floor, and burn up the chaff ; but he will not suffer one grain of pure wheat to be lost. This was the consolatory truth with which the prophet encouraged the godly, while he foretold the miseries which the Jewish nation should endure in the Babylonish captivity : and it is equally applicable to the church of God in all ages. In the words before us are contained,

I. The promise which God makes to his Church—

The Church is here compared to Jerusalem and the tabernacle, particularly with a view to its weakness and danger—

[Jerusalem was “the city of their solemnities,” whither all the tribes went up at stated seasons to worship God : and the tabernacle was the place where God in a more especial manner revealed himself to his believing people. But though, in these points of view, they were objects of God’s peculiar regard, they were at the same time peculiarly exposed to danger. Jerusalem was encompassed with enemies, who incessantly sought its destruction : and the tabernacle (which on this account is mentioned rather than the temple) was assailed by storms and tempests, in the wilderness, and in Shiloh, for many hundred years.

Thus the Church is that society of godly persons, to which all in every place unite themselves, as soon as ever they are converted to God: and it enjoys exclusively the manifestations of God's love and favour. But it is hated by the world with a deadly hatred: and is often menaced by all the powers of earth and hell.]

But God promises that, notwithstanding its weakness, it shall enjoy quietness and stability—

[This was in part fulfilled in the preservation of the Jews at those seasons when all the males were withdrawn from the country, and collected in Jerusalem; none of their enemies ever being permitted to take advantage of their absence, and to attack their land at those times. It was also fulfilled in part, when the temple worship was restored after the Babylonish captivity. But its full accomplishment must be looked for in the apostolic and millennial periods. In the days of the Apostles the Church was assaulted on every side; but it defied the storms, and stood unmoved in the midst of all its enemies. Hypocrites indeed were cast down; but the Church itself stood; “not one of its stakes was moved, nor one of its cords broken.” From the days of Christ to the latest period of time may it be said, with exultation and triumph, “Look upon our Zion;” though apparently defenceless, it stands secure; though fiercely assailed, it is “a quiet habitation;” though it be as a sycamore planted in the midst of the sea, it can never be rooted up. What our ears have heard, “our eyes have seen;” and we believe that it shall endure to all generations.]

Nor will this appear improbable, if we consider,

II. The means of its accomplishment—

The way whereby this promise shall be fulfilled, is set forth,

1. Figuratively—

[Jerusalem was despised as having no river to protect it, as the Church also is on account of its defenceless state. But God promises that “he himself will be to it as a broad and rapid river.” But it may be said that if, in one view, a river defends a city, in another view it affords means of attacking it to advantage. But God fully obviates this by saying, that he will be such a river as shall not be navigated by vessels, either great or small: yea, that in protecting his Church, he will shew himself to be “*the glorious*,” the irresistible “*Jehovah*.” Hence that triumphant language of the Psalmist, “Walk about Zion, and go round about her, tell the towers thereof; mark well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the

generation following; for this God is our God for ever and ever^a."]

2. Plainly—

[The Church is under the immediate government of God, as Israel was of old. He is its Judge, its Lawgiver, and its King, who, while he requires the obedience of his people, is pledged by that very relation to afford them his protection. Men, standing in that relation to us, may be overcome; and we may fall together with them: but we are *thrice* reminded, that it is JEHOVAH who is our defence. Whom then can we have to fear, when the honour, the power, the veracity of Jehovah are pledged for our protection? How absurd is it to be alarmed on account of our own weakness, or of the power and malignity of our enemies! The answer which David gave to those who persuaded him to flee, is that which should be our solace in the most discouraging circumstances; "How say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain, for the foundations are destroyed, and what can the righteous do?" (Tell me not of the failure of earthly helps; for) "JEHOVAH is in his holy temple, JEHOVAH's throne is in heaven^b."]]

INFER—

1. Whither we are to look for the continued enjoyment of our religious privileges—

[It is a mercy to us, that, notwithstanding the enmity of the carnal mind against God is as great as ever, we are preserved by the laws from such persecutions as have been endured by the Church in former ages. But men are changing, and laws may change with them. Our safety therefore does not depend on man, but on God: and on him alone must we rely for the peace and prosperity of Zion. Let us trust in him; and "he will be a wall of fire round about us, and the glory in the midst of us^c."]]

2. Whither we are to look for the peace and stability of our own souls—

[We should first take care that God be indeed the Judge, the Lawgiver, and the King whom we unfeignedly obey: for, if we refuse allegiance to him, it will be in vain to expect protection from him. But, if we have the testimony of our conscience that we devote ourselves unfeignedly to him, we may say with David, "I will not fear, though the earth be moved, and the hills be carried into the midst of the sea." We have an almighty Defender, who is interested in the welfare of his subjects, and is moreover pledged to us by promise and by oath.

^a Ps. xlviii. 12—14.

^b Ps. xi. 1—4.

^c Zech. ii. 5.

Let us then “believe his declaration; so shall we prosper; and believe his promises; so shall we be established:” “we shall be even as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but standeth fast for ever^d.”]

^d 2 Chron. xx. 20. Ps. cxxv. 1.

DCCCCXI.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE WEAK.

Isai. xxxiii. 23. *The lame take the prey.*

IT is impossible to read the Scriptures with attention, and not be struck with the amazing condescension of God, towards the poor, the weak, the desponding. I think we may say, that if God had permitted them to dictate to him what he should say for their encouragement, they could never have ventured to put into his mouth what he has really spoken; so inconceivably gracious and condescending are the promises which he has given them. Let us only look at one or two which are recorded by the Prophet Isaiah. Speaking of his enemies, who thought to injure his people with impunity, he says, “He bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low; he layeth it low, even to the ground; he bringeth it even to the dust: the foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor, and the feet of the needy^a.” And again: “Without me they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain^b;” that is, if there were not one of my people whom they had not imprisoned or slain, the prisoners should come forth from their dungeons, and the slain should arise from their graves, to crush and to destroy them. Indeed God assumes this as his very name whereby he is to be known: “The Lord is his name, that strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress^c.” It is with this view that the words of my text were uttered. The Assyrians menaced Jerusalem with an immense, and, as they supposed, an irresistible army; and God comforted his people by an assurance, not

^a Isai. xxvi. 5, 6.

^b Isai. x. 4.

^c Amos v. 8, 9.

only that their enemies should not prevail, but that they should flee, and leave an immense booty behind them; and that even “the lame amongst his people,” who were scarcely able to walk, should yet go forth and “seize the spoil,” and be enriched by it.

To mark the force of this expression, I will shew,

I. How it was fulfilled on the occasion referred to—

[So exceeding large and powerful was the Assyrian army that was besieging Jerusalem, that there seemed to be no hope of deliverance, but by means of some special interposition of the Deity himself^d — — — As for Hezekiah and his people, they seemed to be in the situation of a travailing woman, who, not having strength to bring forth, was at the point of death^e. But prayer was made by him and the Prophet Isaiah to the Lord: and “in one night an angel of the Lord slew no less than one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian army:” upon which the rest of the army retired in haste, leaving all their property behind them; so that all the people of Jerusalem, like Samaria on another occasion, were enriched by it, and the very weakest amongst them seized his portion of the prey^f. Thus was the promise in my text literally fulfilled; and a pledge was given to the Church, that neither men nor devils should ever prevail against those who should put their trust in Him.]

The text, thus explained, may serve to shew us, in a measure,

II. How it is fulfilling at this time—

Still are the weak triumphant, through the power and grace of God.

Are any weak *in understanding*?

[Fear not: deep as the mysteries of our holy religion are, and infinitely as they surpass the powers of unassisted reason to comprehend, *you* shall comprehend them, if you look to God for the teaching of his good Spirit: yes, “you shall comprehend the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge^g:” whilst the wise of this world shall “account them nothing but foolishness^h.” So it was with the poorer classes of the community in the days of our blessed Lord: “they heard his word gladly,” and received it thankfully; whilst the Scribes and Pharisees “rejected the counsel of God against themselves.” Thus it was also in the

^d Isai. xxxvi. 1—22.

^e Isai. xxxvii. 1—3.

^f Isai. xxxvii. 4, 36, 37.

^g Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^h 1 Cor. i. 23.

Apostle's days. St. Paul appealed to those at Corinth: "Ye see your calling, Brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that that are; that no flesh should glory in his presenceⁱ." And to all who come to Christ for instruction, it is promised that their eyes shall be opened to see the truth, since God had determined that "the things which were hid from the wise and prudent should be revealed unto babes^k." Thus is provision made, even for the weakest, to guide them into all truth; and an assurance is given, that "the way-faring man, though a fool, shall not err therein^l."]

Are any weak *in grace*?

[They need not despond: for "it is not the will of our Father that one of his little ones should perish^m." "Christ will carry the Lambs in his bosom, and gently lead that which is with youngⁿ." Weakness, if felt and deplored, shall never prevent the ultimate success of any soul whatever. Indeed conscious weakness is, if I may so speak, a source of strength, since it will constrain a man to look unto Christ for strength; and "Christ will perfect his own strength in his people's weakness." So true is that paradoxical expression of St. Paul, "When I am weak, then am I strong^o." When did we ever hear of one "who was plucked out of the Saviour's hands^p?" We are assured by the prophet, that, however violently God's people may be sifted, "not so much as the smallest grain shall ever fall to the earth^q." The weakest person in the universe shall "be able to do all things, through the strength of Christ^r;" and however numerous his trials be, he shall be more than conqueror, through Him that loved him^s."]

Are any weak *in faith*?

[This is the most discouraging state of all; because a person strong in faith cannot fail of obtaining all that he can desire^t; whereas a person of a wavering and doubtful mind has but little reason to expect such ready communications as his necessities may require^u. Still, however, if our faith be genuine, it shall prevail; and though it be only as a grain of mustard-seed, yet shall it enable its possessor to pluck up a

ⁱ 1 Cor. i. 26—29.

^k Matt. xi. 25.

^l Isai. xxxv. 8.

^m Matt. xviii. 14.

ⁿ Isai. xl. 11.

^o 2 Cor. xii. 8—10.

^p John x. 28.

^q Amos ix. 9.

^r Phil. iv. 13.

^s Rom. viii. 37.

^t Matt. xxi. 22.

^u Jam. i. 6, 7.

mountain by its roots, and cast it into the sea^x. “To him that believeth, nothing shall be impossible^y.” And it is worthy of observation, that salvation is promised, not to him that is strong in faith, but to him that believeth. Our commission from Christ himself is, to declare, without any reserve, “He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not, shall be damned^z.”]

Thus, at this present time, is the text fulfilled to the least and weakest of God’s people; not one of them, however lame, being so left as not ultimately to “take the prey.”

But we are yet further to shew,

III. How it shall be fulfilled in the millennial age—

[To this period does the prophet apply the very same kind of language as that which I have already so copiously cited from him: “The Lord will have mercy on Jacob; and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob. And the people shall take them, and bring them to their place: and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the Lord for servants and handmaids: and *they shall take them captives, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors^a*.” It seems impossible that the whole world of Jews and Gentiles should be so effectually combated, as to be turned to the worship of the true God, especially by such weak instruments as are now upon earth. But who spread our holy religion through the whole Roman Empire? A few poor fishermen. And what if the servants of God at this day be but few and weak; Is not God able to work by *them*? Has he not even “put his treasure into earthen vessels, *on purpose* that the excellency of the power may be seen to be of Him, and not of us^b?” How did the walls of Jericho fall, but by the sound of rams’ horns? and how were the host of Midian vanquished, but by the breaking of Gideon’s lamps, and the vociferation of a few dispersed men? What effects, then, may we not expect from the preached Gospel at this day, if God be pleased to accompany it with his power from on high? It is as able at this day, as ever it was, to “cast down every thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ^c :” and in God’s good time it shall run and be glorified throughout the whole earth^d.” Unbelief, viewing the world as dead in trespasses and sins, is ready to ask, “Can

^x Matt. xxi. 21.

^y Matt. xvii. 20.

^z Mark xvi. 15, 16.

^a Isai. xiv. 1, 2.

^b 2 Cor. iv. 7.

^c 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

^d 2 Thess. iii. 1.

these dry bones live?" But, in answer to this, I say, Yes, they both *can* and *shall* live: and at the time when God, in answer to the prayers of his servants, shall be pleased to pour out his Spirit upon them, they shall not only resume the human form, but "shall live, and stand up on their feet, an exceeding great army^e." "A nation shall be born in a day^f:" and, by the simple preaching of a crucified Saviour, "all the ends of the earth shall be brought to see the salvation of God^g."]

BEHOLD then,

1. What encouragement is here given to serve the Lord—

[No one need despond. There is no mountain of guilt that shall not be removed by the blood of Christ^h; nor any inveteracy of corruption that shall not be subdued by the Spirit of Christⁱ. Nor is there any confederacy, either of men or devils, that shall prevail to destroy the weakest saint upon the earth^k. "A worm shall thresh the mountains, and make them all like the dust of the summer threshing-floor^l." But some, apprehending that there is somewhat peculiar in their case, are ready to ask, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? Yes: thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children^m." Be it known to all these, for their comfort, that "greater is he that is in them, than he that is in the worldⁿ;" and that "it is not by might or by power that any one is to succeed, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts^o."]

2. What honour will be given to the Saviour at the last day—

[Every one, in that day, will bless himself as the most distinguished monument of mercy that is to be found in heaven. When a saint looks back, and sees with what powers he has conflicted, and yet come off victorious, O! what thanks will he render to the Captain of his salvation, through whom alone he was enabled to maintain the conflict! and what songs of praise will he pour forth to God and to the Lamb for ever! It was in proud self-confidence that the Jebusites defied David, saying, that "except he should take away the blind and the lame, (whom, if there were no others, they supposed capable of defending their impregnable fortress against him,) he should

^e Ezek. xxxvii. 1—10. ^f Isai. lxvi. 8.

^g Isai. lii. 10.

^h Isai. i. 18.

ⁱ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^k Matt. xvi. 18.

^l Isai. xli. 14, 15.

^m Isai. xlix. 24, 25.

ⁿ 1 John iv. 4.

^o Zech. iv. 6.

not come within their city^p: but it is in dependence on Christ that we defy all our enemies, and say without fear, that “the blind and the lame shall repel them all.” “His is the kingdom, and his the power; and his shall be the glory, for ever and ever.”]

p 2 Sam. v. 6—8.

DCCCCXII.

GLORIOUS PROSPECTS OF THE GOSPEL CHURCH.

Isai. xxxv. 1, 2. *The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose: it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God.*

AS the planting of the Jews in Canaan was accompanied with the slaughter of the Canaanites, so in every age the establishment of God's Church on earth is represented as immediately connected with, and in a measure consequent upon, the judgments inflicted on her enemies. This appears, as in many other places, so especially from the words of our text; which are a continuation of the prophecy contained in the preceding chapter, or rather, a transition from one part of the subject to another part of the same subject. In the foregoing chapter, the destruction of the Edomites was predicted, as introductory to the enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom. But the devastation of their country by Nebuchadnezzar did not by any means correspond with the strong expressions used to describe it; nor did the reformation under Hezekiah at all answer to the exalted terms in which the prosperity of Zion is set forth. The true sense of the passage must be found in events yet future. Edom is here considered as a type of all the Church's enemies, which at some future period will be fearfully destroyed; and then will the Church be enlarged and prosper, in a way that has never yet been seen upon earth. “For *them*,” that is, *for those judgments* before spoken of, “will the wilderness and the solitary place be glad,” because they

will open a way for the accomplishment of God's gracious designs towards his Church and people.

The words, as thus explained, lead us naturally to contemplate,

I. The state of persons and places unenlightened by the Gospel—

Whatever advantages any place may possess, it is, if destitute of the Gospel, a dreary wilderness—

[Let us suppose a place in point of beauty and fertility like Paradise itself; let it be the seat of arts and sciences, the emporium of commerce, the centre of civilized and polished society; let it abound with every thing that can amuse the mind, or gratify the taste; still, What is it without the Gospel? What does it afford that can nourish an immortal soul? No heavenly manna is found there: no wells of salvation are open to the thirsty traveller; none are at hand to point out the way to life: its only produce is thorns and briers, which entangle, and impede, and wound us, every step we take; and on every side are snares and temptations, which, like noxious animals, lie in wait for us, ever ready to accomplish our eternal ruin. The cities of Athens and of Rome must in this respect be viewed on a level with the most desolate spots upon the globe: for, whatever they might furnish for the edification or comfort of the carnal mind, they would afford no nutriment to him who was perishing for lack of spiritual food.]

The same observations we must make in relation to the souls of men—

[Whatever strength of intellect a man may possess, or however deeply he may be versed in every branch of human learning; whatever amiable qualities he may have to distinguish him from others; yea, whatever actual enjoyment he may receive from the riches, the honours, the pleasures of the world; yet is his soul “a wilderness,” “a solitude,” “a desert:” God is not there: the fruits of the Spirit are not found there: no heavenly consolations are ever tasted by him: he is without a track, with a guide, without a shelter in the day of trouble, and without any other prospect than that of falling a prey to enemies, or perishing with hunger. The unenlightened soul is compared by Jeremiah, not to a desert merely, but to “a heath in a desert, where no good ever comes^a.” O that those who fancy themselves “rich and increased with goods, and in need of nothing, were made sensible, how wretched they are, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked^b!”]

^a Jer. xvii. 5, 6.

^b Rev. iii. 17.

Let us turn from this humiliating contemplation, to consider,

II. The state to which they are brought by the Gospel—

Beautiful is the description given by the prophet of the change that is wrought by the Gospel of Christ. The souls of men assume altogether a new aspect. In them is found,

The beauty of the rose—

[Where there was but lately no appearance of life, now there arise a holy desire after God, a delight in heavenly exercises, a love to all the people of the Lord, and an ambition to resemble God in righteousness and true holiness. First, but a blossom appears; but gradually the rising foliage bursts from its confinement, and expands itself to the eyes of all, diffusing fragrance all around it. The believer, blessed in himself, makes the very place of his residence a blessing; according to that description given of him by the Prophet Ezekiel; “I will make them, and the places round about my hill, a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessings^c.” Thus by the power of his Gospel “the Lord comforts Zion; he comforts all her *waste places*; he makes her *wilderness* like Eden, and her *desert* like the garden of the Lord: joy and gladness are found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody^d.”]

The stability of the cedar—

[The woods of Lebanon were proverbially grand: its cedars and its pines grew up to heaven, and defied all the storms with which they could be assailed. This was “the glory of Lebanon:” and this glory shall be given to all who are “rooted and grounded in the Lord.” Weak as the beginnings of grace are in the believer’s soul, he shall “shoot forth his roots as Lebanon,” and become “a tree of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified^e.” Storms and tempests will beat upon him; but they shall only cause him to take deeper root, and to evince more clearly, in the sight of all men, that “God’s strength is perfected in his people’s weakness^f.” In like manner shall the Church at large be kept; and “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”]

The fruitfulness of the richest pastures—

[Carmel and Sharon were famous for their pasturage and flocks: such excellency shall be seen wherever the Gospel

^c Ezek. xxxiv. 26.

^d Isai. li. 3.

^e Isai. lxi. 3.

^f 2 Cor. xii. 9.

is preached with life and power. How precious are the ordinances made! What pastures are laid open in the word of God! How strengthening and refreshing does that feast become, which the Lord Jesus Christ has prepared for us at his table! The souls, thus richly fed, "grow up as calves of the stall:" the trees, thus watered by "the river of God," abound in all manner of fruits, even in "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God." Contemplate every "fruit of the Spirit^g;" and that is what is produced by "every plant which God's right hand hath planted."]

Unutterable joy as the result of all—

[The expressions in our text fitly characterize the state of those who are brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel: they "are glad, and rejoice, and blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing." Let any one who has ever beheld a desert brought by cultivation to a fruitful field, and seen it "standing so thick with corn as to laugh and sing;" let him contemplate it awhile; and he will have a faint image, though a very faint one, of "a wilderness" place or person that is "made to blossom as the rose." O that we might behold the picture realized in *this* place, and that every one amongst us might have the image of it in his own soul!]

But it is necessary that we should draw your attention to,

III. That particular view of the Gospel by which these effects are wrought—

It is not by a mutilated and perverted Gospel that these effects are produced, but by *a simple exhibition of Christ crucified, and of the perfections of God as united and harmonizing in the work of Redemption.*

To this it is uniformly ascribed in the word of God—

[Look at the prophets, and you will find it is "*the glory of the Lord*" that they speak of, as *revealed* to men by the Gospel, and as *seen by men* in order to their conversion^h — — — Look at the Apostles, and the same truth is attested by them all; insomuch that they all "determined to know nothing in their ministrations, but Jesus Christ and him crucified:" the one object which they sought by all possible means to attain, was, so to preach, that "God might shine into his people's hearts, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christⁱ:" and till they saw "Christ formed

^g Gal. v. 22, 23.

^h Ps. cii. 16. Isai. lx. 1, 2. and xl. 5. and Ps. xcvii. 6. Hab. ii. 14.

ⁱ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

in them," they were satisfied with no change however great, no profession however confident^k. The commission given to them all, was to "say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" and this they all fulfilled, saying to their people from time to time, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!"^m]

To this also must the effect be traced in the experience of all—

[Who that hears a perverted Gospel, is ever brought effectually to God by it? We may represent the Gospel as a kind of *remedial law*, that supersedes the necessity of perfect obedience, and requires only sincere obedience in its stead; or we may represent the Gospel as proposing a salvation partly by Christ's righteousness, and partly by our own; but we shall never see such effects produced as are described in our text. Let this matter be scrutinized; and the more it is scrutinized, the more the truth of it will be confirmed. It is notorious, that in some persons, and some places, a great change is wrought: and it will be found to be owing to this one thing, that "Christ is preached," and he is received into the heart as "All in all."ⁿ The people are made to "see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God;" and therefore do they rejoice, and consecrate themselves to the service of their God and Saviour. Hence also is their stability; for they would rather die a thousand deaths, than renounce their hope in Him; and hence also their fertility, for they think they can never do enough for him, who has done and suffered such things for them. And this is expressly declared by the Apostle: "We, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."^o]

OBSERVE,

1. What encouragement is here for those who minister in holy things—

[Ministers, especially when invited to labour among unenlightened heathens, are apt to draw back, under an idea that they can never hope to reap a crop in such a soil. But if God has promised that "the wilderness shall rejoice and blossom as the rose," why should we despond? Is not his word as quick and powerful as ever? and can he not, by whomsoever, or to whomsoever it is delivered, make it "sharper than any two-edged sword," so that it shall be "the power of God to the salvation of men?" Only let "his Spirit be poured out from on high, and the wilderness shall be a fruitful field, and the

^k Gal. iv. 19.

^l Isai. xl. 9.

^m John i. 29.

ⁿ Col. iii. 11.

^o 2 Cor. iii. 18.

fruitful field be counted for a forest^p." Though the corn be but an handful, and cast on the summit of a barren mountain, its produce shall be great, and your harvest sure^q.]

2. What encouragement also for those who are dejected on account of the state of their own souls—

[When all your grounds of dejection are stated, they amount to no more than this, that your hearts are a very "desert." But "God's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, nor is his ear heavy that he cannot hear." Possibly you may feel additional ground of despondency, because you have backslidden from the Lord, and therefore fear that he will give you up to final impenitence. If so, then plead with him *that* promise which is made to persons in your very condition; and rest assured, that he will fulfil it to you, if you trust in him^r. You may wait long, as the husbandman does, for the fruit of your labour; but you shall not wait in vain^s.]

^p Isai. xxxii. 15.

^q Ps. lxxii. 16. Here would be the place to enlarge, if it were a *Mission* or a *Visitation* Sermon.

^r Hos. xiv. 4—7.

^s Jam. v. 7, 8.

DCCCCXIII.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE WEAK.

Isai. xxxv. 3, 4. *Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.*

OUR blessed Lord, as the great Shepherd of the sheep, has set an example to all inferior pastors, how to watch over their flock^a. And in the words before us he gives them special direction how to treat the weak and the diseased.

I. Consider the characters here described—

Among the people of God, all of whom are weak as sheep, there are many that, from their peculiar weakness and infirmities, are characterized rather as "lambs, or as sheep that are big with young." These are described in the text,

1. As feeling their weakness—

^a Ezek. xxxiv. 11—16. Isai. xl. 11.

[The “hands and feet” being those members of the body that are fitted for labour, they not improperly represent the active powers of the soul: and the feebleness which they experience through excessive fatigue, gives us a just idea of a soul weary with its labours, and heavy laden with its spiritual burthens. Many there are that are precisely in this state: they have been maintaining a conflict with sin and Satan; they have been enduring the pressure of many trials; and they scarcely know how to support their difficulties any longer: their “hands are so weak and their knees so feeble,” that they are ready to give up in utter despair^b — —]

2. As discouraged by reason of it—

[Many are the misgiving thoughts that arise in the minds of God’s tempted people. When they find their insufficiency to support their burthens, and to overcome their spiritual enemies, they have “great searchings of heart:” they begin to doubt whether they have not altogether deceived their own souls; and whether they may not as well cease from those contests which they have hitherto found so ineffectual. They fear that God has cast them off; that all their professions are mere hypocrisy; and that their renewed exertions will only issue in their greater disappointment^c — —]

If there be any present, whose experience accords with this description, we proceed to,

II. Deliver to them a message from the most high God—

God would not that his ministers should ever “break a bruised reed,” or “despise the day of small things:” on the contrary, he says, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people.” “Strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.” But, because *we* should be at a loss to know what to say, and all that we could say would be to no purpose, if it were the mere offspring of our own imaginations, God himself has put words into our mouths; which therefore we may safely, and confidently, deliver.

[Let the drooping and disconsolate now listen as to the voice of God himself; for it is God, and not man, that thus audibly speaks unto them.

“Be strong, fear not.” This may appear a strange address to those who feel within themselves such reason for despondency:

^b This may be illustrated by David’s case, Ps. xxxviii. 2—8, 17.

^c Ps. lxxvii. 2—9.

but it is God's message to them; and therefore in God's name we deliver it.

But in the text the grounds of this encouragement are stated: and, if duly applied to the soul, they are sufficient to comfort the most distressed, and to invigorate the weakest. "Behold then, your God will come:" yes, that God who, notwithstanding all your fears, is, and will be, *your* God. Think what is implied in this relation, and then say, whether you have not in this word alone an inexhaustible fund of consolation.

He will come "with vengeance" to your enemies, and "with a recompence" to you. He sees with indignation those evil spirits that assault you, and those ungodly men that despise and persecute you, and all those indwelling lusts that harass and defile you: and he has doomed them all to destruction; your lusts, by the operation of his grace, and your enemies, whether men or devils, by his avenging arm. But with respect to yourselves, there is not a tear, which he has not treasured up in his vial^d; nor a sigh, a groan^e, a purpose^f, a wish^g, a thought^h, which he has not noted in the book of his remembrance, in order to recompense it at the resurrection of the just.

In short, "he will come and save you." He is interested in your welfare; and suffers you to be thus tried, and tempted, only for your goodⁱ. He knows "when your strength is gone," and will make your extremity the season of his effectual interposition^k.

Notice the repetitions in this message; for they surely were not inserted thus for nought. It is "*God, even God*," that will come for your relief: it is not a man, or an angel, but JEHOVAH himself, to whom all things are alike possible, and alike easy. Moreover, it is said, "*He will come, he WILL come*;" you need not doubt it, for it is as certain as that he himself exists. He may tarry long: but wait his leisure; and he will come at last^l.]

INFER,

1. How anxious is God for the comfort of his people!

[He charges all his servants to exert themselves for the relief of his people's minds: and expressly sends them a message of love and mercy under their multiplied afflictions. And, lest they should put away from them the word, as not applicable to themselves, he describes them, not by their attainments, but by their defects; not by their hopes, but by their fears. *He describes them by the very terms which they themselves make use of to describe their own state.* What marvellous condescension is this! Moreover, *he sends them exactly such a message*

^d Ps. lvi. 8.

^e Ps. xxxviii. 8, 9.

^f 1 Kings viii. 18.

^g 1 Kings xiv. 13.

^h Mal. iii. 16.

ⁱ 1 Pet. i. 6.

^k Deut. xxxii. 36.

^l Hab. ii. 3. with 2 Chron. xv. 7.

as they themselves would desire, if they were commissioned to declare beforehand what they would consider as an adequate ground of consolation. Can any thing exceed this kindness?

Let us then entertain worthy conceptions of our gracious God; and learn never to doubt his love, or to distrust his care. And, instead of distressing ourselves with fears on account of our own weakness, let us look unto our Almighty *Saviour* to “perfect his own strength by means of it^m.”]

2. How differently must ministers conduct themselves towards the different objects of their care!

[That same divine Shepherd who says, “I will strengthen that which was sick,” adds, “But I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgmentⁿ.” Now there are many who perhaps will bless themselves, that they are strangers to the faintings and fears which are so distressing to others. What message then have we from God to *them*? Shall we endeavour to “confirm and strengthen” them? They need not our assistance; they would despise our proffered help. Shall we say to them, “Be strong, fear not?” Alas! how “shall they be strong in the day that God shall deal with them^o?” They rather need to fear and tremble for the judgments that are coming upon them. “God is coming;” but he is not *their* God; for they have never chosen him for their God, nor given themselves up to him as his people. He is coming with awful “vengeance,” and with a just “recompence” for all their neglect of him. He is coming not to “save,” but to destroy them. Let them then hear the message of God to them^p, and tremble. They must be sick in order to know the value of a physician; and must feel themselves lost, if ever they would be interested in the salvation of Christ^q.]

^m 2 Cor. xii. 9.

ⁿ Ezek. xxxiv. 16. before cited.

^o Ezek. xxii. 14. and Isai. x. 3.

^p 2 Thess. i. 7—9.

^q Mark ii. 17. Luke xviii. 13, 14.

DCCCCXIV.

STREAMS IN THE DESERT.

Isai. xxxv. 5—7. *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.*

THOUGH the truths which we have to proclaim lie in a very small compass, yet do they admit of an

endless diversity of illustration ; so that, though old and well known, they appear ever new. The figure under which the Gospel is here set forth is indeed frequently used in the Holy Scriptures : and well it may be, since it is peculiarly adapted to bring home to our very senses, as it were, the nature and operation of the Gospel, and to display its energy visibly before our eyes. We can conceive of a desert converted into a fertile garden ; and we can form some idea of the multitudes who were healed of all manner of diseases by our blessed Lord. And under these images is the Gospel here exhibited to our view. In the words before us, we are led to contemplate,

I. Its miraculous establishment—

A desert is but too just a picture of the world at large—

[In this country we have a very faint notion of a desert. In some parts of the world there are large tracts of country perfectly sterile, consisting only of burning sands, in which nothing will grow ; and these are infested with all manner of noxious animals. Now certainly this appears, at first sight, to be a very exaggerated representation of human nature : and doubtless it would be so, if we took into the account only man's conduct towards his fellow-man. For it must be confessed, and we bless God for it, that man is not so fallen, but that there yet remain within him many traits of his original worth and excellency. Benevolence, integrity, a sense of honour, a feeling of compassion, are by no means eradicated from every breast ; though, through the violence of temptation, they do not operate so extensively or so uniformly as they ought ; and in many persons, through habits of wickedness, they are almost wholly effaced. But towards God there remains in us nothing that is truly and properly good. We are in this respect all upon a level : we all, without exception, are alike alienated from the life of God, without one spiritual affection towards him. To please him, to serve him, to honour him, we have no purpose, no desire whatever. *Self* has altogether usurped his throne, and is the only object of our solicitude : and if only *self* may be advanced and gratified, we are content to forget God, and to live "without him in the world." Thus, considering a desert to be a place destitute of all good, and full of all evil, we may, *so far as our state before God is concerned*, consider it as a just picture of our fallen condition.]

But by the Gospel a wonderful change is effected in us—

[Conceive of such a desert, as has been described, being, by the almighty power of God, filled at once with springs and rivers, and verdant hills and valleys: conceive of it as freed from all its venomous inhabitants, and covered with flocks and herds for the use of man: and then you will have some idea of what is wrought by the Gospel, wherever it is established. Let the day of Pentecost serve as a specimen. Certainly, if ever there were incarnate fiends, such were the great mass of those who put our blessed Lord to death. But see the change wrought on thousands of them in one hour! It would be deemed incredible, if we did not know that such was really the fact: “the Holy Spirit then poured out,” in confirmation of the Apostle’s word, “turned at once the wilderness into a fruitful field, so that the fruitful field might be counted for a forest^a.” What takes place at this day, upon a smaller scale, is not so visible, or so well authenticated, as that to which we have referred; but *it is altogether of the same character*: for when once “the waters break out in the wilderness, and the streams in the desert, the parched ground becomes a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; and in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, there is grass with reeds and rushes;” vegetation and beauty supplying the place of sterile deformity.

It is scarcely necessary to observe, that this must be the work of God. It far exceeds the power of man. It was the work of Omnipotence in the apostolic age: and, as such, it is here promised to be extended over the face of the whole earth. Jerusalem was indeed the primary seat of this glorious change: but it is to be extended, as the Lord hath said: “Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and *all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God*^b.”]

In accordance with this change, will be found,

II. Its characteristic benefits—

At the introduction of Christianity, many glorious miracles were wrought by our blessed Lord, in confirmation of his word. These were predicted in the passage before us; and to these did our blessed Lord appeal, in proof of his divine mission. “John sent two of his disciples to him, to inquire, Art thou He

^a Isai. xxxii. 15.

^b Isai. lii. 9, 10.

that should come; or do we look for another? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Go, and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them^c." But it is in a spiritual sense, chiefly, that these blessed effects are to be wrought. *In a general view* these have been already described: but now we must notice them under a different image, and with a *more minute attention to circumstances*.

In all our faculties, and in all our powers, we are fallen—

[It is worthy of observation, that, for the elucidation of this point, St. Paul collects a number of unconnected passages from the Old Testament, and strings them, as it were, all together, in order that, by their accumulated weight, they may bear down all opposition to his argument; which is, to prove that "men are all gone out of the way, and that there is none that doeth good, no, not one." "Their *mouth*," says he, "is an open sepulchre; with their *tongues* they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their *lips*: whose *mouth* is full of cursing and bitterness: their *feet* are swift to shed blood^d." Thus, in my text, it is intimated, that men's *eyes* are by nature *shut* against the light of divine truth; that their *ears* are *deaf* to the voice of God in his word; that their *feet never move* in the service of their God; and that their *tongues* are *never employed* in his praise. A very little acquaintance with what is passing in the world around us, or in our own hearts, will suffice to confirm this melancholy description: so true is it, that all of us, even every child of man, are "gone back; they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one^e."]

But in all these respects, through the Gospel of Christ, we are renewed—

[By the preached Gospel, when accompanied with the Spirit of God, "the eyes of the blind are opened;" so that, with different measures of clearness, they "see the things that are invisible" to mortal eyes, even the evil of sin, the beauty of holiness, and "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." By it, too, "the ears of the deaf are unstopped; so that they hear "the small still voice" of God to them, whispering peace to their souls, and "saying unto them, This is the way; walk ye in it." By it, also, "the feet of the lame man are made to

^c Matt. xi. 2—5.

^d Rom. iii. 12—15.

^e Ps. liii. 3.

leap as an hart;" so that they not only walk, but "run in the way of God's commandments with enlarged hearts." Lastly, by it is "the tongue of the dumb made to sing the praises of Jehovah," and to anticipate, amidst all the troubles of this earthly state, the felicity of heaven.

Now this is not a poetic fiction, but a plain and undeniable reality. This is the state of men wherever the Gospel of Christ produces its proper and legitimate effects. It is not among the rich only or the poor, the old or the young, that it operates in this way, but in persons of every age and every class. Wherever it is preached, "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven," there it is "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword," and becomes to multitudes the power of God to the salvation of their souls. The miracles wrought by our blessed Lord were but a shadow of what is wrought, and shall be wrought, by the preached Gospel: and, I thank God, there are millions this day upon earth who can bear witness to this blessed truth, that, in their own actual experience, they are become altogether "new creatures; old things having passed away, and all things being become new."]

OBSERVE then, from hence,

1. What little reason any person has to despond—

[Can any one conceive himself to be in a worse state than that of a desert, destitute of all good, and filled with every thing that is of the most malignant quality? Or, if he take humanity for his standard, can he conceive of himself as in a more deplorable condition than one blind, and deaf, and lame, and dumb? Yet these are the maladies which the Gospel is sent especially to relieve. It does not merely *suffice* for these things; but *it is the prescribed remedy*, which never did, nor ever can, fail. Instead therefore of being discouraged by any sense that we have of our own extreme want and wretchedness, we should take occasion, from our very necessities, to glorify God, and to enlarge our expectations of relief from him; assured, that "his strength shall be made perfect in our weakness," and his grace be magnified in our unworthiness.]

2. What glorious prospects are before us—

[We believe that these wonderful changes shall take place in God's appointed time, and that "all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ." The change from the dreary barrenness of winter to the verdure and fertility of spring, is pleasing to the sight: but, oh! what is it to see a place, where Christ was neither known nor thought of, filled with persons displaying in their souls all the wonderful operations of his grace! And what must it be, to behold these scenes spreading from city to city, from kingdom to kingdom,

till "the whole earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea!" Well, certain it is, that this blessed period is fast approaching; and that "God will comfort, not Zion only, but all the waste places of the earth; making her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; so that in every place shall joy and gladness be found, and nothing be heard but thanksgiving and the voice of melody^f." Let us look forward to this time; yea, let us help it forward to the utmost of our power: and if, but in a single instance, the blind, or deaf, or lame, or dumb, receive the relief which they stand in need of, we shall have no reason to complain that we have run in vain, or laboured in vain^g.]

3. What ground for gratitude has every believing soul—

[Who is it that has made you to differ from others? Who is it that has healed the maladies of your souls, or that has made "your wilderness soul to blossom as the rose?" This, as we have before said, is the work of God, and of God alone: "He that hath wrought us to the self-same thing, is God." And is this no call for gratitude? Look at heathen lands, and see their people bowing down to stocks and stones. Or look nearer home, and see the multitudes around you as unaffected with the Gospel as if it had never visited this highly-favoured country. Perhaps your nearest and dearest relatives are at this moment, in respect of spiritual things, as barren as the most dreary desert, and as destitute of perception as if they had never possessed the organs of sight and hearing. Learn to pity and to pray for them, whilst your souls are transported with joy and gratitude for the mercies vouchsafed to you. And now shew, by your fruits, what a change has been wrought within you, and, by the devotion of all your faculties to God, the healing virtue which you have received.]

^f Isai. li. 3.

^g If this were a *Mission Sermon*, it would be proper to open this part more fully.

DCCCCXV.

THE WAY TO ZION.

Isaiah xxxv. 8—10. *And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with*

songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads : they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

IN the volume of inspiration, the progress of the Gospel in the apostolic and millennial periods is often set forth as a counterpart of the redemption of Israel from the land of Egypt. The power effecting the conversion of men, and all the blessings attending it, are described in terms precisely similar to those which, in their literal sense, are applicable only to the deliverance of the Hebrews from their Egyptian bondage. The power exerted for its accomplishment is the same, as are also the blessings attendant on it. The Prophet Isaiah speaking of that day, when Christ, “the root of Jesse, shall stand for an ensign, to which the Gentiles shall seek,” says, “the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry-shod. And there shall be *an highway* for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; *like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt^a.*” It is of the same periods, and the same events, that he speaks in the chapter before us, and especially in the words of our text; wherein he describes,

I. The way which is prepared for the redeemed to walk in—

Strange as it may appear, the text itself, if not taken in connexion with other passages, may give us an erroneous notion respecting the way of life and salvation. The way is called, and justly called, “The way of holiness:” but we are not therefore to suppose that there is nothing necessary for our salvation but the performance of some good works: for the same prophet, who in our text calls the way to Zion “The way of holiness,” tells us more fully, in another place, that it is the way of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ^b. To mark this, and to bear it ever in mind, is of great importance and indispensable necessity; since our

^a Isai. xi. 10, 15, 16. and Mic. vii. 15. ^b Isai. lxii. 10—12.

Lord Jesus Christ himself assures us, that “*He is the way, the truth, and the life; and that no man cometh to the Father but by HIM^c.*”

Bearing this then in mind, that the way to heaven is *solely by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ^d*, we observe respecting it, that it is,

1. A high and holy way—

[As, in forming a highway, the stones are cast up, and the road is made above the level of the adjacent ground, so is this way far above the low and grovelling paths which are trodden by the world around us: and they who walk in it are walking comparatively “in the high places of the earth.” Raised above the miry clay of sin, it is a holy path: the faith itself is a “most holy faith^e,” and they who are brought to it, are “called with a holy calling^f,” and are themselves “a holy nation^g,” “a peculiar people, zealous of good works^h.” Persons who are ignorant of the Gospel, are ready to suppose that the doctrine of salvation by faith only must be injurious to the interests of morality; but the very reverse of this is true: for they, and they only, who look to Christ for salvation, have either will or power to fulfil the high demands of the Gospel: they, and they only, desire to be “sanctified throughout, in body, soul, and spiritⁱ,” and *that* is the holiness, which alone is acceptable in the sight of God^k. No latitude is allowed to any man: there is the same law for all: and every statute, every ordinance, every injunction in the whole Gospel has the same tendency to make us holy: the more the laws and regulations of Christ’s family are scrutinized, the more it will appear, that “*This is the law of the house; behold, this is the law of the house^l.*”]

2. A strait and narrow way—

[It is “not for the unclean, but for the redeemed alone.” Not that there is any prohibition to any man to walk in it; but the ungodly have no inclination to walk in it: the work of mortification and self-denial is to them distasteful; nor have they any root in themselves from whence the fruits of the Spirit can proceed. But to the redeemed the whole work of holiness is delightful: it is the very element they delight to move in: so far from wishing to be left at liberty to commit any sin, they would gladly “have every thought of their heart brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ^m.” They consider holiness as the very end of their new creationⁿ, yea, the very end also for which they were elected^o, and to which

^c John xiv. 6.

^d Eph. ii. 8, 9.

^e Jude, ver. 20.

^f 2 Tim. i. 9.

^g 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^h Tit. ii. 14.

ⁱ 1 Thess. v. 23.

^k Heb. xii. 14.

^l Ezek. xliiii. 12.

^m 2 Cor. x. 5.

ⁿ Eph. ii. 10.

^o Eph. i. 4.

they were predestinated, from all eternity^p: and, if they could have the desire of their hearts, they would “be holy, as God himself is holy^q,” and “pure, as God himself is pure^r.” Justly therefore is it said by our Lord, that “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it^s.”]

3. A plain and obvious way—

[To those who have no experience of its power, the Gospel, both in its doctrines and precepts, is altogether foolishness^t: but it is so only because they are ignorant of its real nature: they are blinded by Satan and their own lusts^u; and, like the Syrian host, fancy that they are journeying to the heavenly city, when in truth they are going into the heart of an enemy’s country, even to the regions of darkness and despair^x. But “what God has hid from the wise and prudent, he has revealed unto babes^y:” and to those whose eyes he has opened, the way is clear as the light itself. “The knowledge of it is easy to him that understandeth^z:” for a light shines upon it; and “the Angel of the Covenant goes before them in the way, to lead them to the city prepared for them^a.” Thus “darkness is made light before them, and crooked things straight^b:” and if at any time they are perplexed with any important doubts, they need only look up to God, and they hear a word behind them, saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it;” by which they are kept from “turning either to the right hand or to the left^c.” Nor is this the privilege of the learned only, but of all, even the meanest and the least, seeing “they have an unction of the Holy One that teacheth them all things^d:” and so direct is their way made, “that the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.” Of course, we must not be understood to say, that any person is infallible: but this we do and must affirm, that none, however weak, shall be left to mistake the path to heaven, since God has pledged himself to us, that “the meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way^e.”]

4. A safe and secure way—

[It is probable that the strong expressions in our text may refer more particularly to the millennial state: for they exactly agree with what the Prophet Ezekiel has manifestly spoken with an immediate reference to that day^f. But they are true to a certain extent in every age: for though there are

^p Rom. viii. 29.

^q 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

^r 1 John iii. 3.

^s Matt. vii. 13, 14.

^t 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^u 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

^x 2 Kings vi. 19.

^y Matt. xi. 25.

^z Prov. xiv. 6.

^a Exod. xxiii. 20.

^b Isai. xlii. 16.

^c Isai. xxx. 21.

^d 1 John ii. 20, 27.

^e Ps. xxv. 8, 9.

^f Ezek. xxxiv. 24, 25.

lions, and, above all, that “roaring lion, the devil, seeking to devour us,” they are all either chained, that they cannot reach us, or restrained, that they cannot hurt us^g. Though therefore “the redeemed” appear an easy prey to their enemies, they walk at large without any anxious fear. By faith “they see horses of fire and chariots of fire round about them^h,” and they know that “they could have legions of angels sent themⁱ” at their request, if they stood in need of their protection. They are sensible indeed of the number, the power, and the malice of their enemies; but as persons travelling through places infested by wild beasts make a fire round them and are secure, so *they* feel themselves secure, because “God himself is a wall of fire round about them, and their glory in the midst of them^k.”]

Such is the way to Zion: and O that God by his Holy Spirit may draw us, whilst we declare,

II. The happiness of those who journey in it!

“Happy indeed art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord^l!” thrice happy they who walk in his ways! Inexpressibly happy are they,

1. Throughout all their journey—

[Did Israel, when redeemed from Egypt, sing praises to their God^m? Much more do they who are redeemed from death and hell: as soon as ever they are “brought out of the horrible pit, and have set their feet upon the King’s highway, there is a new song put into their mouth, even praise unto our Godⁿ.” It is true they are represented by the prophet, even “the whole company of them, the blind and the lame, the women with child, and she that travaileth with child together, as coming with weeping and with supplication^o,” but this is so far from destroying their joy, that it is the very root from which it springs, the seed from which the harvest of joy proceeds^p. There is in the weeping of a real penitent a holy tenderness, which is no less grateful to his soul than the livelier ebullitions of joy itself: yea, so deeply does he feel his own unworthiness, that he would not wish to “rejoice, but with trembling: nor, if he were transported to heaven itself, would he so exult, as to forget to cast his crown before the Saviour’s feet^q.” Indeed this very mixture of ingenuous shame with triumphant exultation is intimated by the Prophet Jeremiah, who, immediately after representing the saints as “weeping,”

^g Dan. vi. 22. with Ps. lxxvi. 10.

ⁱ Matt. xxvi. 53.

^k Zech. ii. 5.

^m Exod. xv. 1.

ⁿ Ps. xl. 2, 3.

^p Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6.

^q Rev. iv. 10.

^h 2 Kings vi. 15—17.

^l Deut. xxxiii. 29.

^o Jer. xxxi. 8, 9.

proceeds to paint their happiness as most sublime, not only on account of the deliverance they have experienced, but on account of the continued communications of all spiritual blessings to their souls^r — — — And well may we expect them to “return with singing,” when they consider from what paths they have been brought, and to what a glorious state they are “coming;” and, above all, by what a price they have been ransomed, even by the blood of God’s only dear Son. Had they been “redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold,” they could not but rejoice; but having been ransomed “by the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot^s,” they are filled with wonder; and are ready almost to account it all a dream^t; like Peter, who, when delivered from prison, could scarcely credit his deliverance, but “thought he saw a vision^u.” Doubtless this joyous frame does not exist in all alike, nor in any equally at all times: their remaining infirmities are sometimes called forth to the wounding of their consciences, and the clouding of their souls. Even Paul himself sometimes cried, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?” But still, by renewed applications of the blood of Christ to their souls, their consciences are purged from guilt, and their joy in the Lord is revived. Thus, whilst they go through the valley of Baca, they find wells of salvation, from which they draw water with joy, and are refreshed; and thus they go on from strength to strength, till they appear before God in Zion^x.]

2. At their journey’s end—

[It has been just observed, that “sighing and sorrow” occasionally interrupt the Believer’s joy; and indeed they follow him at a greater or less distance all his journey through: but when once he arrives at the gate of heaven, those blest inhabitants, “joy and gladness,” come forth to meet him; and “sorrow and sighing flee away.” Then is his joy uninterrupted and unmixed; for he is introduced into “the presence of his God, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasure for evermore.” Could we but get a glimpse of him in those sacred mansions, could we behold the raptures with which he tunes his harp to the praises of his God and Saviour, truly, we should proclaim him blessed beyond all expression or conception. Let us then look into heaven; (for so it is permitted us;) and let us listen to his voice. Methinks we hear the full chorus of the redeemed, singing, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing^y!” — — — And, if we inquire concerning them,

^r Jer. xxxi. 11—14. See also xxxiii. 11.

^s 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

^t Ps. cxxvi. 1, 2.

^u Acts xii. 9.

^x Ps. lxxxiv. 6, 7.

^y Rev. v. 9—13.

"Who they are? and Whence they came?" we shall be informed distinctly, not that they were innocent in themselves, or had done so many good works, but, that "they had washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb: *therefore* are they before the throne of God." And that which constitutes no small measure of their happiness is, an inward consciousness that it shall continue for ever without any mixture, intermission, or end: "They shall hunger no more, nor thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat: for the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes^z." What an amazing change is this, even from the best state that can be enjoyed here below! Well may it be said, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord;" for, whilst every thing painful has for ever passed away^a, they are unceasingly occupied in the immediate vision and complete fruition of their God.]

EXHORTATION—

[Permit me now to address myself to every individual amongst you. And what terms can we find more apposite, than those wherein Moses addressed his father-in-law? "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you. Come with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel^b." Consider, what a blessed way it is: it is "the good old way^c, wherein the Prophets and Apostles walked; yea, and wherein our blessed Lord himself walked, "leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps^d." What way can the world point out that is comparable to this? Think too of the end to which it leads: shall not this thought engage you to come with us; and not only to begin with zeal, but also to "run with patience, the race that is set before you?" — — — As for you who have commenced your journey heavenward, lift up your hearts to God, that he would enable you to "hold on your way^e," and "so to run that you may obtain the prize^f." Pray that you may never be weary, never halt, never turn back; but that your course may be uniformly holy; or rather, that "your light may shine more and more unto the perfect day^g."]

^z Rev. vii. 9—17.

^b Numb. x. 29. See also Mic. iv. 2.

^d 1 Pet. ii. 21. 1 John ii. 6.

^f 1 Cor. iv. 9.

^a Rev. xiv. 13. with xxi. 4.

^c Jer. vi. 16.

^e Job xvii. 9.

^g Prov. iv. 18.

DCCCCXVI.

HELP FOR US IN GOD.

Isai. xxxviii. 14. *O Lord, I am oppressed: undertake for me!*

THE time of death is an awful season to every child of man: but it may be more or less terrible, according to circumstances. There may, in that hour, be such manifestations of God's presence vouchsafed to the soul, and such bright prospects of a glorious immortality, as altogether to divest death of its sting, and to render it an object of intense desire. On the other hand, there may be such darkness of mind, or anguish of body, or such urgent considerations of a personal or domestic nature, as may exceedingly embitter the thoughts of approaching dissolution. The account which we have of Hezekiah's feelings on an occasion like this, fills us with deep commiseration. His disorder was so violent, that he expected every day to be his last; and God seemed to him like a lion, likely to break all his bones, and to devour him every instant. Hence "he mourned as a dove; and his eyes failed with looking upward:" and in utter despair of help, except from God, he poured out the prayer which we have just read, "O Lord, I am oppressed: undertake for me!" There were in his case some peculiar reasons for deprecating with more than common earnestness the impending stroke: for he was but in the middle age of life; and hoped to proceed with the work of reformation which he had successfully commenced through the whole nation. In the event of his removal too, he had no son to succeed him: and he feared that the people, just beginning to return to the Lord their God, would immediately relapse into all the idolatries, from which he had strenuously exerted himself to reclaim them. To this chiefly we trace the extreme desire which he expressed for the prolongation of his life, and the overwhelming agony with which, in the words before us, he committed his cause to God.

But here we see,

I. The privilege of God's people in seasons of deep distress—

They are at liberty to commit their every concern to God—

[Of whatever kind their trials may be, they may spread them all before the Lord, with a confidence that he will afford them effectual relief. They may even “cast all their care on God himself,” in an assured hope that he will “undertake for them,” and take upon himself the entire charge of all their concerns. They may commit to him the directing of their path, the supplying of their wants, “the keeping of their souls,” not doubting but that, as their Creator, their Governor, and their Redeemer, he will be faithful to his own engagements, and execute for them whatsoever in his unerring wisdom he sees best for them — — —]

This is their most inestimable privilege—

[They are not left to bear their burthens alone: if they were, they would utterly sink under them. We see in the case of Job how difficult it is to support affliction; (for even he at last cursed the day of his birth:) and daily experience shews us how unable any of us are, of ourselves, to bear up under the various trials of life. But we have a God to go unto; a God who says, “Cast thy burthen upon the Lord, and he will sustain thee.” As for spiritual trouble, we are no more able to endure it than Judas was, who, from a sense of guilt, took refuge in suicide. If “help were not laid upon One that is mighty,” upon One who says to us, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;” what hope could any one of us enjoy? But with such a Refuge, and such a Friend, we may well be satisfied: for “He is both a sun to enlighten us, and a shield to protect us; and he will give both grace and glory; and no good thing, either in time or in eternity, will he withhold from us,” if we humbly and unfeignedly commit our cause to him.]

In Hezekiah's use of this privilege, we see,

II. The success that shall attend the exercise of it—

It is of little importance to inquire how far the application of a fig to Hezekiah's boil was an appropriate remedy for his disorder. Whatever its operation was, it was God alone that rendered it effectual: and the same divine power can give success to any means which shall be used for *our* good, either in a temporal or spiritual view. The imminence of our danger is no

bar to God's interposition. All that he wants is, the prayer of faith: and that once offered, the deliverance, how difficult soever it may be, shall be vouchsafed.

Only let us commit our cause entirely to God—

[We must despair of help from the creature. God permits our trials to increase, in order to produce this very effect upon us. "We must have the sentence of death in ourselves, that we may not trust in ourselves, but in God, who raiseth the dead." Whilst there is any mixture of self-dependence in us, God will not interpose: but when, like Peter sinking in the waves, we cry, "Save, Lord, or I perish!" he will instantly stretch out his almighty hand, and afford us the succour we implore.]

His intervention then shall bear upon it the evident stamp of his Divine agency—

[In a multitude of instances in which he "undertook for his people" of old, his power was as evident as in the passage of the Red Sea, or in the ruin of the walls of Jericho. I say not that his interposition in our behalf shall be as visible to the eye of *sense*: but to the eye of *faith* it shall. Wonderful will be the support which he will give to the troubled spirit; inasmuch that, whilst all outward circumstances remain the same, it shall have "the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Look at the 107th Psalm: it is realized every day. Such are the spiritual distresses of God's people, and such their deliverances in answer to their prayers——If therefore there be any one that is now "oppressed" with any grievous affliction, let him go to the Lord Jesus Christ, and spread his wants before him, with confidence that he shall not pray in vain. Let the 143d Psalm be his pattern and his encouragement. David there says, "My spirit is overwhelmed within me, and my heart within me is desolate. But I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee as a thirsty land. Hear me speedily, O Lord: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit: cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning, for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee^a." Spread your wants before your God in that way; and be assured, that "though heaviness may continue for a night, joy shall come to you in the morning." "God will not contend with you for ever, lest your spirit should fail before him:" but "he will be with you in trouble," and "be to you a light in your darkness," and "give you songs in

^a Ps. cxliii. 4—8.

the night." "These things will he do to you, and not forsake you," till "he has turned your mourning into dancing, and put off your sackcloth, and girded you with gladness:" for "never yet failed he any one who trusted in him;" "nor said to any of the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain."]

DCCCCXVII.

FORGIVENESS KNOWN AND ENJOYED.

Isai. xxxviii. 17. *Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.*

IN all the Scriptures there is not any thing more tender and pathetic than this "writing of Hezekiah after he had recovered from his sickness." In it he delineates all his feelings in the view of his expected dissolution. He could appeal to God that he had "walked before God with truth and with a perfect heart^a;" and yet in the prospect of death was more alarmed and agitated than any other person of whom we read. To account for this, commentators have supposed that he had respect only to the welfare of his Church and people, who by his removal would lose the benefit of all his past exertions for their good, and of those which he yet contemplated. But whilst we agree in ascribing much of his grief to this, we yet think that it by no means sufficiently accounts for many of his expressions, which evidently refer to his own personal concerns. In our text he complains that "for peace he had had great bitterness;" though from it he was now mercifully relieved. His "anguish being now changed^b," he returned thanks to God, saying, "Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."

These words of his I shall,

I. Explain—

They may not unfitly be considered as referring to,

1. The recovery of his body—

^a 2 Kings xx. 2, 3.

^b So Bishop Lowth translates the first clause.

[Sickness and death were originally introduced by sin: and in many instances have they been inflicted in token of God's displeasure on account of sin. The leprosy of Miriam was a visitation on account of sin, as was that also of Gehazi. And the worms which preyed on the vitals of King Herod received their commission from an offended God. Even the Christian Church is exposed to the same kind of correction from the hand of an angry Father: for, on account of the abuses which obtained among the Corinthians at the Lord's supper, "many were weak and sickly among them, and many had fallen asleep^c." Not unfrequently were temporal judgments inflicted with an express view to prevent the necessity of inflicting far heavier judgments in the world to come^d.

Now it seems evident that Hezekiah viewed his sickness in this light, namely, as a judgment sent from God on account of some iniquity which he had committed. As the enemies of David said in his sickness, "An evil disease, that is, a disease judicially inflicted, cleaveth fast unto him^e;" and as the enemies of the Lord Jesus accounted him to be judicially "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted^f;" so did Hezekiah judge respecting himself at that time: he thought that God was now "calling his sins to remembrance^g," and punishing him on account of them.

With such views as these, we cannot wonder that during the continuance of the affliction he should "have great bitterness;" and that in the removal of it he should find such an occasion of joy and gratitude. And it is worthy of observation, that the Psalmist speaks of the removal of temporal judgments from the people of Israel in terms exactly similar to those which Hezekiah uses in reference to his recovery from sickness: "Lord, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob: thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people: thou hast covered all their sin: thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger^h."

This then shews us why the pious Hezekiah so grievously complained of his sickness, and so earnestly implored a restoration to health. This explains those words of his, "Like a crane or a swallow, so did I twitter; I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail for looking upward: O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me."]

2. The state of his soul—

[When he complains of God having, "like a lion, broken

^c 1 Cor. xi. 30.

^d 1 Cor. xi. 32. as also 1 Cor. v. 4, 5.

^e Ps. xli. 8.

^f Isai. liii. 4.

^g 1 Kings xvii. 18.

^h Ps. lxxxv. 1—3.

all his bones," it seems evident, that God had withdrawn from him for a season his wonted consolations, and that he was much in the state of David, who, under the pressure of a dangerous illness, cried, "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps: thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy wavesⁱ." Whether there was any particular occasion for this dispensation, we are not informed. We know that Job, who was esteemed by God himself "a perfect man," was subjected to a similar trial for his good. And, if this dispensation had no other end than to counteract that propensity to pride which afterwards broke forth, and brought down upon Hezekiah the severest displeasure of the Almighty, it was justly and graciously ordained.

For deliverance from a state like this, we wonder not that Hezekiah should bless and magnify the Lord. Who can think of being delivered from the pit of corruption, and not rejoice? Who can contemplate God as having "cast all his sins behind his back," and not bless him from his inmost soul^k? Consider what is implied in this expression: it imports that "God will remember our sins no more." Once "he set our iniquities before him, and our secret sins in the light of his countenance^l;" but now he hides his face from them^m," "blots them outⁿ" from the book of his remembrance, and "casts them into the very depths of the sea^o," from whence they shall never rise to appear against us in judgment. Verily, if on the receipt of such a mercy as this "he had held his peace, the very stones would have cried out against him."

We must not omit to notice the source to which Hezekiah traces this great deliverance: it is to God's sovereign love and mercy. He does not say, "From a respect to my deserts thou hast done thus;" but, "in love to my soul" thou hast done it. And to this must all spiritual blessings be traced. Whatever mercy God has vouchsafed to us, it is the fruit of "his great love wherewith he has loved us^p," even of that love which knows neither beginning nor end^q.]

The words thus explained, I shall now proceed to,
II. Improve—

There are two remarks which I will make upon them. They shew us, in a very forcible way,

1. What should be our chief desire under any afflictive dispensation—

[Our great concern usually is to get the affliction itself

ⁱ Ps. lxxxviii. 3—7.

^k Ps. ciii. 1—4.

^l Ps. xc. 8.

^m Ps. li. 9.

ⁿ Isai. xliii. 25.

^o Mic. vii. 18, 19.

^p Eph. ii. 4.

^q Jer. xxxi. 3.

removed. But judgments may be removed in anger, as well as sent in anger^r: and God may cease to smite us, only because he is determined not to strive with us any longer, but to give us over to final impenitence^s. Our first object should be, to inquire of God “Wherefore he contendeth with us^t?” and then to seek the removal of that sin which God has visited with his displeasure. If we can fix on no particular sin, which has provoked God to anger, yet we know that there is an immense load of guilt upon our souls: and therefore we should pray as David did, “The troubles of my heart are enlarged: O bring thou me out of my distresses! look upon mine affliction and my pain, and *forgive all my sins*^u!” — — — Sin, even one single sin, being retained before God’s face, will be the heaviest curse that can befall us: but, if our sins be “cast behind his back,” the most accumulated trials shall only “augment our eternal weight of glory^x” — — —]

2. What exalted happiness we are privileged to enjoy—

[Hezekiah spoke of the forgiveness of his sins as already granted, yea, and manifested also with full assurance to his soul. And this is the common privilege of all believers. As Isaiah had a live coal from off the altar applied to his lips, with this assurance, “Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged;” so have we the promises applied to our souls at this day, “the Holy Spirit of promise sealing them upon our hearts^y,” and thereby becoming to us “a Spirit of adoption, and a witness of our being the children of God^z.” Doubtless there are marks by which these manifestations must be determined^a — — — but it is not by the marks alone that we can attain the consolations here spoken of: these can be imparted only by Him who is emphatically called THE COMFORTER: but the assurance itself is, if not the attainment of all, yet certainly the privilege of all, who truly believe^b.

Live not then below your privileges. And, as God generally makes use of afflictions to prepare us for the enjoyment of them, learn to welcome any trials which it may please God to send^c — — —

Only, if God cast your sins behind his back, be the more concerned to set them ever before your own face^d; that your own souls may be the more deeply humbled^e, and that the grace of God may be the more abundantly exalted^f — — —]

^r Hos. xiii. 11.

^s Gen. vi. 3. Isai. i. 5.

^t Job x. 2.

^u Ps. xxv. 17, 18. Here a variety of sins may be pointed out, as subjects of self-examination.

^x 2 Cor. iv. 17.

^y Eph. i. 13.

^z Rom. viii. 15, 16.

^a 1 John v. 13. and iii. 14.

^b 1 John v. 20.

^c Rom. v. 3—5.

^d Ps. li. 3.

^e Ezek. xvi. 63.

^f 1 Tim. i. 12—14.

DCCCCXVIII.

PRAISING GOD FOR HIS MERCIES.

Isai. xxxviii. 19. *The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth.*

THIS is a part of a most pathetic record, written by Hezekiah after his recovery from a sickness which he had expected to terminate in death. The description which he gives of his feelings is certainly very different from what we should have expected from so good a man: but when we reflect on the particular situation in which he was placed, as a reformer of all his subjects; and the prospect that by his removal all his past efforts would be frustrated; we no longer wonder that he should express so great anxiety to live, and such a lively sense of his obligations to God, who, in answer to his prayers, and the prayers of the Prophet Isaiah, had promised to add fifteen years to his life. Indeed, under almost any circumstances, the living have reason to bless their God for the prolongation of their days: and the words which I have read will afford me a fit occasion to shew the return which this mercy at all times calls for at our hands. It is the duty of every living man to glorify his God,

I. In a way of devout acknowledgment—

Such a return is called for,

1. From those who are yet unprepared for death—

[Let them reflect a moment, where they would have now been, if they had been taken hence in their present state; let them consider how many have been removed, whilst they have been left; and what the feelings are of those who have been so taken into the presence of their God—and methinks they will need no exhortation from me to praise their God, they will find their souls penetrated with the devoutest gratitude, and will be saying, “The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day.” Tell me, ye who are here alive this day, have ye not reason to bless your God for the space which is yet given you for repentance; for the opportunities yet afforded you of access to God through Christ; for the continued influences of the Holy Spirit, who yet striveth with you

to bring you to salvation? Suppose one, who has been called to his great account, and doomed to the misery which his sins have merited, could be restored for a few days to the situation in which you stand; would he be insensible to the mercy vouchsafed unto him, or lukewarm in improving his renewed advantages? No, verily; so great a blessing would not be despised by him; but he would instantly become an example to all around him, saying, “Bless ye our God, *as I do this day!*” Do ye then regard the blessing of a protracted life, as ye would if so restored; and employ your every remaining hour in making that life a blessing indeed, even the means of securing everlasting blessedness and glory at the right hand of God.]

2. From those also who are ready to meet their God—

[It may be thought that *these* have the less reason to be thankful for life, because they are already prepared for death, which would be to them a door to everlasting happiness. But this was the state of Hezekiah, who could appeal to God, that he had “walked before him in truth and with a perfect heart, and had done that which was good in his sight^a.” and yet it was this holy man who uttered the thanksgiving in our text. It must be remembered, that there are many great and glorious ends of life, which are instantly and for ever frustrated by death. The instant that we depart hence, there is no more opportunity of honouring God on earth, or of benefiting our fellow-creatures, or of advancing our own eternal interests: “The grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee; they that go down to the pit, cannot hope for thy truth:” these are things which the living only can engage in: and therefore the living are bound to estimate their high privileges aright, and to improve them with all diligence, as long as these advantages are continued to them. Doubtless, in the eternal world, the dead in Christ are happy. But is there a redeemed soul that does not desire to advance the honour of his God in this world? Is there one who does not long to promote the temporal and eternal welfare of his fellow-sinners? or is there one who does not wish to augment the talents committed to him, that in so doing he may find a greater measure of approbation from his God? I say, then, to every one here present, whatever be the measure of grace that you have attained, you are greatly indebted to God for the prolongation of your life; and it should be to you a subject of most ardent praise and thanksgiving.]

But this gratitude should be expressed also,

II. In a way of affectionate commendation—

^a ver. 3.

It is well to speak of God's mercies, whether they be general or special, public or personal; as it is said, "One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts: they shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness^b." But it should seem that Hezekiah was peculiarly anxious to transmit to succeeding generations the knowledge of the true God, and of all the wonders which he had wrought for his people Israel. And this is the desire which every living man should feel; and especially under the dispensation under which we live, wherein the truth of God, in all the wonders of redeeming love, is made known to the children of men.

We ought to transmit to others the truth that has been revealed to us—

[This was the command repeatedly given to Israel of old^c — — — And the obligation to obey it was deeply felt by all the saints, who regarded God's Law as a sacred deposit, committed to them for the benefit of their children, and their children's children, even to the latest generations^d. For this very end it was that the Passover^e and other rites^f were ordained, and that memorials also were established^g; even that an inquiry might be excited, in every successive generation, into the things so exhibited to their view; and that the information contained in them might be transmitted and perpetuated to the end of time. The Lord's Supper is intended to answer the same end; for, in the administration of it, *we shew forth the Lord's death* till he come^h."]

And the hope of effecting this ought to make life regarded by us as an invaluable blessing—

[What father would not wish to make known God's truth to his children; and account the prolongation of his life a rich mercy from the Lord, as giving further opportunities for the advancement of their eternal welfare? I may say, too, what pastor, who stands, as it were, in the relation of a father to his flock, would not adore his God for the strength whereby he is enabled to labour for their good? The Apostle Paul judged, so far as respected his own personal feelings, that it was "desirable rather to depart, and to be with Christ:" but yet,

^b Ps. cxlv. 4, 7. ^c Deut. iv. 8, 9. and vi. 6, 7.

^d Ps. lxxviii. 2—6. ^e Exod. xii. 25—27.

^f Exod. xiii. 14, 15. ^g Josh. iv. 22—24. ^h 1 Cor. xi. 26.

reflecting on the importance of his life to the welfare of the Church, he was willing to forego his own personal happiness, and to have a life of labour and of suffering prolonged to him, that he might still further advance the interests of God's people^l. Thus should the hope of benefiting others endear life to us; and every effort be made, as long as life shall last, to transmit to others the light which we ourselves have received.]

And now, Brethren,

1. Let me call you to the performance of this duty—

[It is a duty equally pertaining to all, (so far as they have an ability to discharge it,) to “render unto the Lord according to the benefits conferred upon them:” yea, all should strive to be, in this respect, patterns and examples to those around them. To those in like circumstances with ourselves, we should be able to say, “Let all of you praise God, *as I do this day*.” But permit me to ask of the generality amongst us, What would be the state of things, if all were to take *you* for their pattern? Would God be glorified in any measure as he ought? or would his truth be diffused as it ought to be? Would not rather the mercies of God pass unacknowledged, and his revealed will be almost utterly forgotten? Do not think that a mere lukewarm engagement in God's service will suffice. If, indeed, the blessing of life call for nothing better at your hands than this, I will be content that you shall render him nothing better: but if life be of such importance as I have represented, then I call on every living soul to say with David, “Praise the Lord, O my soul: while I live will I praise the Lord; I will sing praises unto God while I have any being^k.”]

2. Let me urge it by that most appropriate consideration which occupied the mind of the grateful Hezekiah—

[“The grave cannot praise God, nor can death celebrate him^l.” This is the only time for serving and honouring God in this world. And how soon this opportunity may have passed away, who can tell? Another day, and all power to serve your God may have passed away for ever. I must then say to you, “Work whilst it is day; for the night cometh wherein no man can work^m.” Should your soul be required of you before you have given yourselves up to God, how painful will be your reflections to all eternity! But did ever any man think that he had begun to honour God too soon; or had too diligently engaged in that blessed work? Is there one in heaven that regrets he began to serve his God so soon? or is there

^l Phil. i. 21—25.

^l ver. 18.

^k Ps. cxlvi. 1, 2.

^m John ix. 4.

one in hell that curses not his folly for neglecting to improve the advantages that were afforded him? I call you, then, to prevent those sad reflections which a neglect of God will occasion in a dying hour; and to secure now the eternal approbation of your God, by dedicating yourselves altogether to his service.]

DCCCCXIX.

HEZEKIAH'S THANKSGIVING FOR HIS RECOVERY.

Isai. xxxviii. 20. *The Lord was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments, all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord.*

TO make public acknowledgments to God for national mercies is a duty so evident, that persons of all characters and denominations are forward to the performance of it. The very heathens thought that they had not properly testified their joy on account of any signal victories or deliverances, till they had made some public procession to the temples of their deities, or offered sacrifices to their honour. A greater cause for thankfulness than that which we are now assembled to commemorate, England scarce ever saw^a. A sovereign, who, for his excellent qualities in domestic life, stands almost unrivalled; a sovereign, who is truly the father of his people; a sovereign, who is, if I may so speak, the idol of the nation which he governs, is restored *to health* from the most afflictive of all disorders, and *to the government of his kingdom* at the very moment it was to be transferred to other hands: what cause for joy and thankfulness is this! And indeed ye have already in some measure testified your joy; and I would hope the reality was as universal as the appearance: but surely we should not rest satisfied with such demonstrations of joy; we should have our lamps trimmed and our lights burning *within* us: we should have a sacred flame kindled in our hearts; and we should endeavour to excite others to rejoice with us. When David was brought, as he tells us, into the dust of death, and, in answer to his prayer, was

^a Preached on the occasion of the recovery of his late Majesty, George III. March 15, 1789.

delivered from it, he said, “ I will declare thy name *unto my brethren ; in the midst of the congregation* will I praise thee. Ye that fear the Lord praise him ; all ye, the seed of Jacob, glorify him ; and fear him all ye the seed of Israel : for he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted ; neither hath he hid his face from him, but when he cried unto him, he heard : my praise shall be of thee *in the great congregation ;* I will pay my vows *before them that fear him*^b.” Now such should be the desire of our hearts to glorify God for the king’s recovery : not contented with offering up our praises in secret, we should say with him in the text, “ the Lord was ready to save ; therefore we will sing our songs *in the house of the Lord.*”

In discoursing upon these words, we will consider,
I. The import of the words—

This will partly appear from the occasion on which they were uttered—

[This chapter begins with a very affecting account of King Hezekiah’s sickness : a message was sent to him from the Lord, to tell him that he should die of his disorder. These melancholy tidings no sooner reached his ears than he turned his face towards the wall and wept very sore. In the ninth and following verses we have a copy of what he himself wrote concerning the workings of his own mind under that affliction : “ The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness : I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave ; I am deprived of the residue of my years : I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living ; I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world : mine age is departed and is removed from me as a shepherd’s tent ; I have cut off, like a weaver, my life ; he will cut me off with pining sickness, from day even to night will he make an end of me : I reckoned till morning that as a lion so will he break all my bones, from day even to night will he make an end of me : like a crane, or a swallow, so did I chatter ; I did mourn as a dove ; mine eyes failed with looking upwards ; O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me.”

Now it is possible enough that he was, in a considerable degree, under bondage to the fear of death : but yet we cannot

^b Ps. xxii. 22—25.

suppose that all this grief originated from that one cause: no, he doubtless felt much for the glory of God and the prosperity of his people, both of which, as far as he could judge, would be very materially affected by his removal at that particular crisis. He was one of the best kings that ever governed the Jewish nation. No sooner did he come to the throne than he began to reform the abuses which had been introduced in preceding reigns. He threw down the altars that had been built; he opened and repaired the temple which had been shut up and left to decay; he restored the sacrifices which had been long neglected; he stirred up the people throughout all the kingdom to reform their lives; and he ardently longed to see these beginnings of reformation carried further into effect. He had very lately beheld the whole country overrun by Sennacherib's army, and Jerusalem itself reduced to the utmost distress and danger; and though he had seen a great part of the Assyrian army destroyed by the hand of God, yet he knew that the Assyrians were still a powerful enemy, and that if the Jewish nation should relapse into their former wickedness, they could not expect another miraculous interposition from God. He was aware also that having no son to succeed him, there would probably be intestine divisions about a successor; so that if he were taken away at this time, the cause of religion would be neglected, and the whole Jewish nation be given over to suffer the consequences of their apostasy from God. That these reflections greatly contributed to his grief, seems plainly intimated in the answer which God gave to his prayer, as it is recorded both in 2 Kings xx. 6, and in the chapter before us; in both of which places God not only promises to prolong his life, but to deliver the city out of the hands of the king of Assyria, and to defend it for his own name's sake. Afflicted with these gloomy prospects, he betook himself to the best of all remedies, *prayer*: and as we are expressly told that Isaiah joined with him in crying to heaven on a former occasion, it is reasonable to suppose that, when he saw the king so overwhelmed with the news which he had brought him, he did not neglect this opportunity of joining with him in prayer for his recovery. Behold, their prayer prevailed; yea, so speedily did it prevail, that before Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Tell Hezekiah, thus saith the Lord; I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears, behold, I will heal thee." God moreover commanded the prophet to make a plaster of figs, and to put it upon the boil, and to assure the king that in three days he should be well enough to go up to the house of the Lord. This was done to shew that we ought to use means, while at the same time we look not to the means, but to God, for the desired success. Being restored to health he comes into the

house of the Lord, and pours out his soul in pious and devout thanksgivings: knowing that, if he had died in his illness, he should never have had any more opportunities of glorifying God before men, he exclaims, "The grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee, they that go down to the pit cannot hope for thy truth; the living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day; the father to the children shall make known thy truth:" and then he adds in the words of the text, "The Lord was ready to save me, therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord."]

But we shall have a further insight into the meaning of the text, if we consider more particularly the words themselves—

[They contain a thankful acknowledgment to God for his recovery, and a determination to glorify him for it as long as he should live. "The Lord was ready to save me," says the king. He does not blasphemously ascribe his recovery to his physicians, or to the means used, notwithstanding they were used according to God's own prescription; but he gives the honour, where alone it is due, to God. In disorders of any kind our eyes should not be so fixed upon the creature as they usually are; our expectation should be from God alone: it is "he who killeth and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up." But that which Hezekiah seems to have been more particularly affected with, was the Lord's *readiness* to help him; "the Lord was ready to save me." This is a matter of astonishment to all who have ever tried the power and pre-*valency* of prayer: God does not indeed bind himself to answer prayer immediately, at least not in the way in which we expect it to be answered; yet does he often with marvellous condescension grant the requests of his people as soon as they are offered up; he often visibly fulfils that precious promise recorded in Isaiah, "It shall come to pass that before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear." David mentions this as his own experience, and seems to have been struck with it as Hezekiah was; "I will praise thee with my whole heart, O God; for in *the day* when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul^c. So Hezekiah in the text; "The Lord was ready to save me; therefore will we sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord." He determined that as the mercy vouchsafed to him was a public benefit, so he would manifest his sense of it by public acknowledgments. He recorded this mercy and had it set to music, that all the nation might join with him in singing praises

^c Ps. cxxxviii. 1, 3.

to God for it. Nor would he suffer it ever to be effaced from his memory: he made the recital of this mercy a part of his daily devotions; and determined he would continue to do so as long as he should live; judging very properly that his life, which had been so miraculously spared, should be spent wholly in the service of his God.]

Nothing more being necessary to illustrate the meaning of the words, we shall pass on to notice,

II. The use we should make of them—

1. To excite our gratitude for the king's recovery—

[There is a striking resemblance between the event which we are now met to commemorate, and that recorded in the passage before us. I will beg leave to point it out in several particulars.

It holds good *in the persons who were ill*. Hezekiah, you have heard, was one of the most illustrious kings that ever sat upon the Jewish throne: the glory of God and the welfare of his people were ever near his heart. He set a good example to all his subjects, and ardently desired to see them no less obedient to their God than loyal to himself: he published his edicts prohibiting whatever was offensive to God, and enforcing the observance of the divine laws: in short, if you would know his character, see it drawn by the inspired penman: "Thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good, and right, and truth before the Lord his God: and in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, *he did it with all his heart*, and prospered^d." Now compare that of our gracious Sovereign: he has but limited power, and therefore cannot effect all he would; but what he would do if he were able, we see by the proclamation which was not long since issued. But this is a part of our subject on which it would not be proper to say much, nor is it needful that we should; for we trust his excellent qualities are too deeply engraven in all our hearts to need any repetition of them from this place—

But further—The resemblance holds good *in the probable consequences of their illness*—Hezekiah was sick nigh unto death, so that, till his recovery, he was utterly incapacitated for the business of the nation. If he had been left in the state he was, or had been taken away, his subjects would have suffered an irreparable loss. What they would have suffered we may judge in part from what they did actually suffer, when Manasses the son of Hezekiah came to the throne: idolatry was re-established throughout the kingdom; and God, wearied as it were with the greatness of their provocations, gave them

^d 2 Chron. xxxi. 20, 21.

over, together with Manasses their king, into the hands of their Babylonish enemies. What would have been the consequence if our Sovereign's illness had continued, none can tell. We mean not to cast reflections upon any person or party; we would abhor a party spirit either in religion or politics: but this we may say without a possibility of giving offence to any; that, however wisely the defect of an executive power might have been supplied, and however faithfully it might have been employed, still the nation would have suffered an almost irreparable injury; for the very sinews of government would have been cut asunder. This, we say, would have been the case, supposing that every thing had been planned with the most consummate wisdom, and executed with the most unblemished integrity: but what *might* have happened, God alone knows: blessed be his name! he has delivered us now from the apprehensions of the calamities we have so earnestly deprecated, and so justly dreaded.

Again—The resemblance holds good *in the means by which they were recovered from their illness*. What was there in a plaster made of figs that could give so sudden a turn to a mortal disorder as to remove it in three days? Just as much as there was in the waters of Jordan to cleanse Naaman from his leprosy, or in the clay and spittle which our Lord used, to open the eyes of a blind man. It was prayer that healed Hezekiah; yes, prayer pierced the skies and entered into the ears of the Lord of Hosts. "I have heard thy prayer, said God, and have seen thy tears, and will heal thee." And what has healed our gracious Sovereign? we answer without disparagement to any, PRAYER: a spirit of prayer has been poured out upon all God's people throughout the nation: all that have an interest in the court of heaven, have cried day and night to God on his behalf. The prayers of the church prevailed for the delivering of Peter out of prison: so we doubt not but that the king's recovery is an answer to prayer; to the prayers of those very people who are yet too often hated, despised, and persecuted. It is true: God has used means; but what means? not the art of medicine, but repose and quiet. We mean not to detract from the merit of those who have assisted in his cure; they deserve well of the nation at large: and we shall rejoice to see them rewarded according to their desert: but the glory is God's, and his alone: the king's recovery is the gift of God; and *that* in answer to the prayers of his own people; and, we trust, that they will not discontinue their prayers for him even to the latest hour of their lives.

Once more—The resemblance holds good *in the readiness with which God vouchsafed the desired mercy*. Hezekiah's and Isaiah's prayer was answered before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court; and in three more days the cure was effected.

So has it been with respect to the cure vouchsafed unto our Sovereign; it was withheld for a season, just to make all praying people earnest in their supplications. The rod impending over the nation seemed for some time ready to fall: yet was the stroke by various occurrences providentially delayed: and then at the very moment that it was *expected* to fall, behold! deliverance comes: so truly may the words of the text be applied to this event, "the Lord was *ready* to save." Surely that proverb has been again verified to us, that "in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen;" for God did not deliver Isaac more seasonably from the hand of Abraham, than he has done us from the calamities which threatened us.

Now if the occasions for joy and thankfulness are so similar, ought not our expressions of thankfulness to be similar also? Ought we not to render unto God according to the benefits he hath conferred upon us? Yes, surely. Did Hezekiah then make his deliverance a matter of universal praise? let us stir up both ourselves and others to a devout and holy joy on account of the recovery of our king. Did he determine that he would make it a subject of public thanksgiving? let us do the same: and did he determine to remember it and sing of it all his days? let us endeavour to keep upon our minds a lively sense of this mercy, and not provoke God to withdraw it from us by our ingratitude.]

2. To excite our gratitude for the mercies of redemption—

[We all without exception are sick nigh unto death: what Isaiah says of the Jews is applicable to every nation upon earth: "the whole head," says he, "is sick;" that is, the kings and nobles, and all the governors in church and state, are infected with a mortal disease; "and the whole heart is faint," that is, the people at large, without any exception, are dying of the same malady: "from the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in us, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores." Sin is this deadly disorder, and unless we be recovered from it, the consequence must be dreadful to us all. We are not left to conjecture what this may be; we know; we know for certain; we know that no temporal calamity whatever can be compared with it: we know that our disorder, if not speedily cured, must issue in everlasting death; in an everlasting separation of soul and body from God, and in an everlasting suffering of divine vengeance. But we are fully warranted to say with Hezekiah in the text, "the Lord is ready to save us." Of all the thousands and tens of thousands who came to our Lord for healing when he was on earth, not so much as one applied in vain: nor did ever any one call upon him for spiritual healing without experiencing his readiness to save. And is he not "the same yesterday, to-day, and

for ever?" Would Jesus ever have come down from heaven, if he had not been ready to save? Would he have shed his precious blood for us, if he had not been ready to save? Would he have sent his word, his ministers, and his holy Spirit, to invite and draw us to him, if he had not been ready to save? Has he not said, "As I live I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die?" And would he thus have sworn, invited, entreated, and expostulated, if he had not been ready to save? Beloved brethen, would to God that ye would all put him to the trial! not one of you would then ever perish in your sins; he would cleanse you in his blood from all sin; he would restore your souls to health; and make them to flourish in immortal youth and beauty. Do you ask, How shall I obtain this blessing? We answer, just as the king of Judah, or the king of Britain, were restored to health: means were used for both; but the means were very inadequate to the end which was to be obtained: that which prevailed for both, was prayer; and that shall prevail for you. If you were like Jonah at the bottom of the sea in a whale's belly, the prayer of faith should deliver you. Still however you must use the means; attend to the word that is preached; and read the Bible in your closets: but do not imagine that these means can convert your souls: no; *that* is the Lord's work; and you will use all means in vain, if you do not beg of God to render them effectual. But if you pray, you will find the Lord far more ready to give, than you are to ask. To save sinners is his work, his office, his delight; it is "the joy which was set before him, in expectation of which he endured the cross and despised the shame:" yea, it is the import of his very name; for he was "called Jesus, because he was to save his people from their sins." This is a perpetual ground of joy to all; it calls for our devoutest thanks and praises: it should make us all adopt the language of the text, and say, "The Lord is ready to save me; therefore will I sing songs to him all the days of my life, in the house of the Lord."

But if you *have been* restored to health; if you have experienced his salvation; if upon a review of your past life you can say with Hezekiah, "The Lord *was* ready to save me;" what ought to be the frame of *your* mind? how should you give thanks! the Psalmist says, "Let them give thanks whom the Lord hath redeemed;" and if *they* will not, who will? The angels were not half so much indebted to him, as they for whom he shed his blood. "O then give thanks, give thanks unto our God; for it becometh well the just to be thankful:" "O come let us sing unto the Lord, let us heartily rejoice in the God of our salvation."]

AN ANALYSIS OF THE FOREGOING SERMON.

[*The Author had at one time thought of inserting a considerable number of short sketches; but he relinquished the idea, from an apprehension that they would not afford sufficient aid to those, whose more immediate benefit he consulted. The following Analysis is added as a specimen.*]

PUBLIC acknowledgments of national mercies are proper. The king's recovery is a just ground for them at this time.

I. The import of the words. In which observe—

1. The occasion of them. Here notice—

[Hezekiah's illness, and dread of approaching death. His character, as most concerned for God's glory and the national welfare. The probable consequences of his death. The means of his recovery: prayer—figs. His expressions of thankfulness for it.]

2. The words themselves. These contain—

[*The grounds of his thankfulness; that God had restored him; and that he had been ready to do so. The expressions of it. He would give all the glory to God. He would do it publicly. He would have others to do the same. He would do it all his life.*]

II. The use we should make of them—

1. To excite our gratitude for the king's recovery—

[*The occasions are similar; as to the persons that were ill (compare Hezekiah, and the king): as to the probable consequences of their not recovering: as to the means used for their recovery, PRAYER: and as to the readiness of God to comply with our requests.*

Our gratitude should be similar; public—universal—fervent—perpetual.]

2. To excite our gratitude for the mercies of redemption—

[*All are sick nigh unto death. The consequences of not recovering will be dreadful. The Lord is ready to heal us. PRAYER is the grand mean of recovery. All should rejoice; the sick, that the Lord is ready to save; the recovered, that he was, and still is, ready.*]

DCCCCXX.

THE SCOPE AND TENDENCY OF THE GOSPEL.

Isai. xl. 1, 2. *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.*

THE ministerial office is fitly compared to that of a steward, who divides to every one his proper portion^a. The execution of it calls for much wisdom and discretion, because there must be a diversity both in the matter and manner of our addresses corresponding with the different states of the people to whom we minister. To some we must of necessity proclaim the terrors of God's law, however painful such a discharge of our duty may be: but the great scope of our ministry is rather to comfort the Lord's people, and to "guide their feet into the way of peace." The commission here given to the servants of Jehovah, is very remarkable, being thrice repeated in one single verse. In this view of it I am led particularly to shew,
I. How earnestly God desires the comfort and happiness of his people—

There are a people, chosen by the Father, redeemed by Christ, and sanctified by the Spirit, who are eminently the Lord's people^b. And that God is peculiarly solicitous to promote their comfort, appears,

1. From the commission which he gave to his beloved Son—

[He sent his Son into the world to execute his eternal counsels. And our Lord himself, in his first public address to the people, declared, that the comfort of mourners was a principal object of his mission^c.]

2. From the end for which he sends his Spirit into the hearts of men—

[God sends his Spirit to testify of Christ^d, to witness our adoption into his family^e, and to seal us unto the day of

^a 2 Tim. ii. 15. Luke xii. 42.

^b Deut. vii. 6. 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^c Isai. lxi. 1—3. Luke iv. 17—19. ^d John xv. 26.

^e Rom. viii. 15.

redemption^f. In performing these offices he comforts our souls. And he is, on that very account, distinguished by the name of "*the Comforter*^g."]

3. From the titles which the Father himself assumes—

[He calls himself "The God of consolation^h," and "the Comforter of all them that are "cast downⁱ." He compares his concern to that of a Father pitying his child^k, and to a mother comforting with tenderest assiduities her afflicted infant^l. Yea, he assures us that his regards far exceed those of the most affectionate parent in the universe^m.]

4. From the solemn charge he gives to ministers—

[He sends his servants "to turn men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto Godⁿ." And he especially charges them to "strengthen the weak hands, to confirm the feeble knees, and to say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; your God will come and save you^o." *Thrice* is that injunction repeated in the text: and in the execution of this duty we are justly called, "The helpers of your joy^p."]

5. From the dispensations both of his providence and grace—

[When he suffered his beloved Son to be tempted in all things like unto us, it was with a view to comfort us under our temptations^q. And when he comforted St. Paul under his multiplied afflictions, he still consulted the comfort of his Church and people^r: yea, however he diversified his dispensations, he had invariably the same gracious object in view^s.]

As a further proof of his regard for our comfort, we may point out to you,

II. What abundant provision he has made for it in his word—

The message which we are commanded to deliver to his people, contains in it the richest sources of consolation—

1. To God's ancient people—

[To them primarily was this proclamation made. And it was verified in part, when they were delivered from the Babylonish captivity and restored to the enjoyment of their former

^f Eph. i. 13, 14.

ⁱ 2 Cor. vii. 6.

^m Isai. xlix. 15.

^p 2 Cor. i. 24.

^s 2 Cor. i. 6.

^g John xvi. 7.

^k Ps. ciii. 13.

ⁿ Acts xxvi. 18.

^q Heb. ii. 18.

^h Rom. xv. 5.

^l Isai. lxvi. 13.

^o Isai. xxxv. 3, 4.

^r 2 Cor. i. 3, 4.

privileges in Jerusalem. But it was yet further fulfilled, when, by the sending of their Messiah, they were delivered from the yoke of the Mosaic law, which imposed a burthen which none of them were able to sustain. That, to those who received him as their Messiah, was a season of exceeding great joy; for they were translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, and from a state of insupportable bondage "into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

It will not however be fully accomplished, till they shall, in their national capacity, return from their present dispersion, and be re-united, Israel with Judah, in their own land. Then will their warfare be as much accomplished as it can be in this life: then will the tokens of God's displeasure be removed from them; and a state of prosperity be vouchsafed to them that shall far exceed all the sufferings they have ever endured, and all the privileges they have ever enjoyed. At no time have they ever been punished beyond their deserts; (their severest trials have been far less than their iniquities deserved:) but in that day shall their blessings infinitely exceed all that they can now either contemplate or conceive — — —]

2. To his believing people, in every age—

[It is the true Christian alone who can form any just idea of the import of my text. "His warfare is accomplished;" so far at least, as that he is in a state of victory over the world, and the flesh and the devil. He can say, "Thanks be to God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ." "His sins too are blotted out as a morning cloud," and "put away from him as far as the east is from the west." God has mercifully "forgiven him all trespasses;" and he stands before God "without spot or blemish." As for the blessings vouchsafed to him, no words can possibly express them: his "peace passeth all understanding;" and his "joy is unspeakable and full of glory." "He has even now entered into rest^t," according to that promise given him by our Lord, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden; and I will give you rest" — — —]

SEE, then, Brethren,

1. What a wonderful difference exists between those who embrace, and those who disregard the Gospel—

[Can *that* be said of carnal and worldly men, which is here spoken of the Lord's people? Are *their* chains broken? *their* sins forgiven? *their* comforts greater than any judgments that await them? No: they are yet in bondage to sin and Satan;

^t Heb. iv. 3.

their sins are all “sealed up in a bag” against the day of judgment; and the wrath of God is shortly coming upon them to the uttermost. Then it will appear how great a “difference there is between those who serve the Lord, and those who serve him not^u.” Let not this distinction then be made a subject of profane ridicule, but a motive to seek the Lord, that we may be numbered with his people, and be made partakers of his benefits.]

2. What inconceivable blessedness awaits the Lord’s people in a better world!

[Even in this life, as we have seen, their blessedness is exceeding great. But what will it be when once they shall lay down this mortal body, and enter into the joy of their Lord? Now conflicts remain even to their latest hour; and whatever victories they may gain, they must still remain girt for the combat. And, though “God has forgiven them all their trespasses,” so that he will never frown upon them in the eternal world, they still have occasion daily to implore mercy at his hands on account of their short-comings and defects. But in the day that they shall be taken into the immediate presence of their God, O! who can tell us what they shall “receive at his hands?” — — — Dear Brethren, do not think lightly of that joy; but be willing to sacrifice every thing for the attainment of it. Think in what estimation it is held by all who have entered into the eternal world. What would tempt those in heaven to part with it? or what would not they who are now in hell, give to be made partakers of it? Be assured, that it will be fully commensurate with all your labours, though they had been a thousand times greater than they have; and that one single hour of it will richly recompense all that it is possible for any finite creature either to do or suffer in the Saviour’s cause — — —]

^u Mal. iii. 18.

DCCCCXXI.

THE IMMUTABILITY OF THE GOSPEL.

Isai. xl. 6—8. *The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.*

GOD doeth according to his own will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.

When his time was come for the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, in vain did Pharaoh labour to retain them. Thus the prophet was inspired to declare the redemption of the Jews from Babylon, and the still greater redemption of the world from sin and Satan, in despite of all endeavours which might be used to thwart the divine purpose. This seems to be the immediate scope of the words before us. But they may also be taken as a general declaration respecting *the instability of every thing human, and the immutability of God's word.*

I. The instability of every thing human—

The comparison of man to grass is very frequent in the Scriptures; and it affords a just description of,

1. Our temporal comforts—

[The grass in the early spring adorns and beautifies the face of nature; but, when parched by a burning sun or an eastern blast, it soon withers and decays: in the same manner the beauty and strength of youth are soon turned to weakness and deformity: the affluence and honour of the rich are quickly changed to degradation and want: and all our goodly fabrics of ease and happiness are soon demolished. St. James illustrates this truth by the very comparison in the text^a: and as Job experienced it in the days of old, so in every age may numerous instances be found of such vicissitudes.]

2. Our spiritual comforts—

[God is pleased to give rich consolation to his people: and, while they enjoy it, their faces are made, as it were, to shine, as the face of Moses did, when he descended from the holy mount. But these comforts are often of short continuance. When Peter thought of building tabernacles to protract his happiness, a cloud immediately overshadowed him, and he was called down to renew his conflicts with the world^b. When David fancied his mountain so strong that he should never be moved, God hid his face from him and he was troubled^c. Thus it is also with all the people of God; whose manifold changes in this respect may well be compared with the diversified scenes of nature under the influence of kindly showers, or malignant winds^d.]

3. Our very life itself—

^a Jam. i. 9—11.

^b Mark ix. 5, 7, 14.

^c Ps. xxx. 7.

^d Ps. cii. 2—4.

[In the midst of health we promise ourselves years to come: but, when God withdraws our breath, we instantly return to our native dust. Some look more gay and possess more "goodliness" than others; but they are only as the "flower of the field," which cannot survive the grass, and not unfrequently falls before it. In this view the inspired writers describe our state^e; and both observation and experience attest the truth of their representations: we must all confess, in the language of the text, "*Surely, the people is grass.*"]

But while every thing human is thus frail and transient, we have a firm foundation whereon to stand, namely,

II. The immutability of God's blessed word—

The "word of God" here spoken of, may be understood as relating to *Christ*, who is often called by this name, and whose immutability is mentioned by the Psalmist in this very view^f. But St. Peter informs us that the prophet spake of the Gospel-salvation^g. Now

This "word" contains the most important and comfortable truths—

[There is no want, which it is not able to supply, no disorder, for which it does not prescribe a remedy. It proclaims health to the sick, sight to the blind, liberty to the captives, and life to the dead. So extensive are its invitations and promises, that there is not a human being excluded from its provisions, nor is there any limit to the blessings which it will impart. It assures us, that sins of a crimson die may become white as snow; that the most heavy-laden soul may obtain rest; and that none, who come to Jesus, shall on any account be cast out^h.]

Nor is it a small excellence in these truths, that they are as immutable as God himself—

[How vain were the attempts of men and devils to stop the progress of the Gospel, and to make void the declarations of God respecting it! Equally vain shall be every endeavour to invalidate the promises which he has made to the believing penitent. Has he said, that "all manner of sin shall be forgiven; that he will cleanse us from all our filthiness and from all our idols; and that, where he has begun the good work, he will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ?" We may rest

^e Job xiv. 1, 2. Ps. xc. 3—6. Ps. ciii. 15, 16.

^f Ps. cii. 11, 12, 26, 27. ^g 1 Pet. i. 24, 25.

^h Isai. i. 18. Matt. xi. 28. John vi. 37.

assured that he will fulfil his word: for “he is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man that he should repent.” But it may be said, “Though God changeth not, yet we change, and therefore may forfeit our interest in the promises.” True; if God should leave us, we not only *may*, but most undoubtedly *shall*, both fall and perish. But God has said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; so that we may adopt the confident declaration of St. Paul, “I know in whom I have believed, that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him.” We must be strong in faith, giving glory to God. Then, though difficulties may arise, and appear for a while wholly insurmountable, they shall surely be overcome: “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain; and we shall see the salvation of God.”]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. The folly of seeking our rest in earthly things—

[The injunction given to the prophet to “cry,” and to proclaim aloud that “all flesh is grass,” and *the frequent repetition of this comparison*, are strong intimations of the extreme vanity of every thing here below. And who amongst us has not found that the enjoyments he fondly anticipated, have either eluded his grasp, or deceived his expectation? Whatever then be our comforts in life, let us not set our hearts upon them, but “so use the world as not abusing it, knowing that the fashion thereof passeth away.”]

2. The wisdom of embracing the Gospel-salvation—

[They who trust in the word of God are sure of never being disappointed. However high their expectations are raised, they shall never be ashamed. The stronger their faith, the more abiding will be their comfort. Besides, their enjoyments, instead of cloying, will become more and more delightful; and, instead of bringing with them many inseparable ills, will produce nothing but good to their souls. But that which most of all must endear the Gospel to them is, that their happiness will then be consummated, when they, whose comforts were of an earthly nature, will want even a drop of water to cool their tongue. Let the word of God then be precious to our souls. Let Christ, as revealed in it, be the object of our faith, and hope, and love. Let us embrace the promises, assured that they shall all be fulfilled; and let us tremble at the threatenings, knowing that they shall all be executed. Thus shall we be proof against the temptations of the world, and shall possess an eternity of glory, when the lovers of this present world will lie down in everlasting burnings.]

DCCCCXXII.

THE MESSIAH'S ADVENT.

Isai. xl. 9. *Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God.*

THE Gospel with all its sublime mysteries is regarded by the generality with coldness and indifference; whereas the most indistinct prospects of it were sufficient to fill the patriarchs and prophets with holy rapture. It was a view of its Divine Author which drew forth from the prophet this animated exhortation. He saw Jesus as it were already incarnate, and called upon the daughters of Zion and Jerusalem to proclaim and celebrate his advent^a. That, which he proposed to them as the subject of their song, is the one great subject also of our ministrations. To call your attention unto Jesus, to set him forth as crucified before your eyes, and, with an exalted voice, to cry, Behold your God! this is our commission. But before we proceed to execute it, we shall,

I. Shew what is implied in this commission—

We cannot fail to observe, what the prophet so strongly intimates,

1. That Christ is God—

[This is a fundamental article of our faith. The Godhead of Christ is that which stamps a value on his sufferings, and renders the whole of his undertaking so meritorious and efficient. It would be to little purpose to say with Pilate, "Behold the man," if we could not also add with the prophet, "Behold your God." But we are not left to doubt of this important truth: it is clearly established in almost every page of the sacred volume: we need go no further than to the writings of Isaiah; and we shall find it expressly asserted, that the person who was to be "a Child born, and a Son given to us," WAS THE MIGHTY GOD.^b He was *therefore* to be called Emmanuel, because he was God with us^c. In the very chapter before us, his forerunner, John the Baptist, was commissioned to cry,

^a It should be read as in the margin, "O daughter, that bringest good tidings to Zion," &c. It was customary for women to celebrate the praises of God in public on remarkable occasions. See Exod. xv. 20, 21. and 1 Sam. xviii. 6, 7.

^b Isai. ix. 6.

^c Isai. vii. 14. with Matt. i. 23.

Prepare ye the way of THE LORD (Jehovah) make straight in the desert an high-way for OUR GOD.^d But we need not multiply words on this subject, since the voice of inspiration universally proclaims him to have been, “God manifest in the flesh,” “God over all, blessed for ever^e.”

2. That the knowledge of Christ is of universal importance—

[It was through all “the cities of Judah,” and with her “voice lifted up with strength,” that the daughter of Zion was to celebrate the Messiah’s advent. And whence the need of such zeal and labour, but on account of the universal importance of those glad tidings? Indeed there is no other thing which men so much need to be acquainted with as the work and offices of Christ. No attainments can save them, if they be ignorant of Christ; nor can any past sins condemn them, if they be truly acquainted with this divine Saviour. “This,” as our Lord himself tells us, “is life eternal, to know God as the only true God, and Jesus Christ^f,” as our Mediator and Advocate with the Father. So excellent is this knowledge, that St. Paul “counted all things but loss and dung in comparison of it^g.” It is the one mean of obtaining reconciliation with God, peace of conscience, and deliverance from the power of sin^h. O that all were aware how deeply they are interested in receiving these glad tidings! We should proclaim them with infinitely greater pleasure, if we had not so much reason to complain, that “they are counted as a strange thingⁱ.”]

Taking for granted these fundamental and indisputable truths, we shall,

II. Endeavour to execute the commission—

The text does not limit us to any particular point of view in which we are to behold our God; we shall therefore direct your attention to him,

1. As descending from heaven—

[Lo! he comes from his bright abodes: but in what form does he appear? Does he descend in solemn pomp, attended with myriads of the heavenly host? Does he visit the palaces of the great, and assume our nature in its most dignified appearance? No: He is born of an obscure virgin, and has no better place for his reception than a stable. Go, look into his mean abode; see him wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and lying in a manger; look, I say, and behold your God! What

^d ver. 3.

^e 1 Tim. iii. 16. Rom. ix. 5.

^f John xvii. 3.

^g Phil. iii. 8.

^h 1 John i. 7.

ⁱ Hos. viii. 12.

marvellous condescension! how does it almost exceed belief! yet, incredible as it appears, we must again say, Behold your God!]

2. As sojourning on earth—

[Surely, no sooner could his incarnation be known, than all the world, like the eastern Magi, must flock to worship him^k. So one might reasonably hope; but what is that “weeping and lamentation” that we hear? The young child’s life is sought. The children from two years old and under are massacred through the whole district, that no possibility may be left for his escape: and He is saved only by the special interposition of his heavenly Father^l. See his parents fleeing with him by night to a distant, a heathen, land, not daring to return to their native country till the death of their blood-thirsty persecutor! But this was only the beginning of sorrows. View him afterwards when he assumed his proper office as the Prophet of his church: no sooner did he open his commission, than the short-lived applause afforded him was turned into the most cruel indignation; and if he had not by an exertion of his own almighty power effected his escape, his very first sermon had proved his last^m. But to pass over to the period of his death. Whom is it that we see prostrate on the ground, and bathed in a bloody sweat? Who is it that those cruel soldiers are mocking, buffeting, scourging? Who is it that is nailed to yonder cross, and that we see expiring under such an accumulated weight of shame and misery? To all this we answer, Behold your God!]

3. As exalted to glory—

[Hitherto we have witnessed nothing but his humiliation; but the shame of his cross was quickly rolled away. In vain were the stone, the seal, the watch: he burst the bands of death, and rose triumphant. Henceforth we are to view him ascending amidst myriads of exulting angels, sitting on the throne of his glory, dispensing blessings to the church below, and receiving the adorations of his church above. Sinner, lift up thine eyes to heaven, and behold thy once crucified, but now exalted, Redeemer! Now he shines forth in all his glory, and says to thee, even to thee, “Behold me, behold meⁿ!” O that every eye might see him, and that all, who have pierced him by their sins, might mourn and be in bitterness, as one that mourneth for his first-born son^o! Soon indeed all shall see him: the time is shortly coming, when he will descend from heaven again, not however to stand, as before, like a criminal at man’s tribunal, but to execute judgment on the assembled universe; and then happy shall they be who have beheld him

^k Matt. ii. 11.

^l Matt. ii. 16—20.

^m Luke iv. 28—30.

ⁿ Isai. lxxv. 1.

^o Zech. xii. 10.

here with suitable affection; they shall behold his face with inexpressible delight; and be the spectators of his glory, and the partners of his throne, to all eternity.]

ADDRESS—

1. The careless—

[Know you what the sins, which you commit so lightly, have occasioned? Go to Calvary and behold your God; and then judge whether sin be so light and venial a matter as you are ready to imagine! The Jews and Romans were the immediate actors in that bloody tragedy; but your sins, and the sins of an ungodly world, were the real occasion of all that your God endured; and, while you continue in your sins, you “crucify him afresh, and put him to an open shame.” Ah! did David cast away the water, for which the lives of three men had been endangered, and will not you cast away the sins which have actually shed the blood of God^p? Let this thought induce you to put away the polluted cup from your lips; and and let “the love of Christ constrain you to live unto him who died for *you* and rose again.”]

2. The heavy-laden—

[To you especially the Saviour cries, “Look unto me, and be ye saved! “Come unto me, and find rest unto your souls!” Consider well, who it is that thus invites you; it is your Saviour, and your *God*: there can be no want of efficacy in his blood, or of power in his arm: he is a strong rock, a sure foundation, an all-sufficient help. Trust then in him; and, as a sight of the brazen serpent healed the dying Israelites, so shall a view of your divine Saviour prove an effectual remedy for all your wants. You shall soon, like Thomas, exclaim with holy rapture, “My Lord and my God!” or, in the language long since dictated to you by the spirit of prophecy, “*Lo, this is OUR GOD*; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him: we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation^q!”]

^p 2 Sam. xxiii. 16, 17. with Acts xx. 28. ^q Isai. xxv. 9.

DCCCCXXIII.

CHRIST'S CARE FOR HIS SHEEP.

Isai. xl. 11. *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom; and shall gently lead those that are with young.*

THE holy Psalmist, speaking of Jehovah's care of him, says, “The Lord is my Shepherd:” and then,

from the union of the Godhead with the pastoral office, he infers, "Therefore I shall not want^a." The same incomprehensible union is mentioned by the prophet in the passage before us. The heralds that proclaimed the advent of the Messiah were commanded to draw the attention of men to them in these words, "Behold your God!" The person thus announced, is further described in the words preceding our text; "Behold! the Lord God will come:" and then it is added, "HE shall feed his flock like a shepherd." Now when it is considered how prone the Israelites were to idolatry, it cannot be conceived that the prophet should speak of the Messiah in such exalted terms, if they did not properly belong to him. But the prophets generally, and Isaiah in particular, are very full and explicit in declaring, that Jehovah was to become incarnate, and by the sacrifice of himself to redeem and save a ruined world. It is not however of his *person* that we now propose to speak, but of his *office*; *that* being the particular point to which my text refers: yet it would be improper to pass over such a strong testimony to the divinity of our blessed Lord, because, in the judgment of all, but more especially of Jews, it must have the effect of silencing every doubt upon that important subject. And it adds no little interest to the description here given of him, when we know, that He who so condescends to minister as a Shepherd to the least and meanest of his flock, is the Most High God: according as it is written, "To us a child is born, to us a Son is given; and his name shall be called, The Mighty God^b."

The words which form the ground-work of our discourse, will lead me to set before you,

I. A general view of our Lord as a Shepherd—

The character of a shepherd is frequently assigned to our blessed Lord, in the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament^c: and every duty pertaining to that office is executed by him:—

^a Ps. xxiii. 1.

^b Isai. ix. 6.

^c Ezek. xxxvii. 24. Zech. xiii. 7. Heb. xiii. 20. 1 Pet. v. 4.

1. He gathers them to his fold—

[They are “wandering upon the dark mountains, in a cloudy and dark day^d,” “every one going in *his own way*^e,” and “after the imaginations of his own heart^f”— — — The paths of all, though differing from each other according as the age, the inclinations, and the diversified temptations of the different individuals may lead them — — — all agree in this, that they are far distant from the ways of God’s commandments^g. But “he searches for them, and seeks them out:” he follows them by the preaching of his word, by the dispensations of his providence, by the mighty working of his Spirit; and, having found them, “he apprehends them” by his pastoral crook^h, and “makes them willing” to return with himⁱ, and “carries them home upon his shoulders rejoicing^k”— — —]

2. He provides for their wants—

[O! how sweet are the pastures into which he leads them^l! Who can express the delight which a converted soul experiences in feeding upon the promises, “the exceeding great and precious promises” of his God? — — — In comparison of the food provided for the sheep of Christ, all else is but as “husks on which the swine subsist^m.” This is set forth in Scripture under the image of a luxurious feastⁿ: and verily it is “a feast of fat things” to all the saints; a feast, of which even the angels themselves might account it a privilege to partake^o — — —]

3. He affords them his effectual protection—

[Weak as they are, and beset with many enemies, they are preserved in perfect safety^p — — — He who laid down his life for them, will suffer “none to pluck them out of his hand^q” — — — “They lie down beside the still waters^r,” which are a just emblem of the tranquillity of their own souls — — — “They are kept in perfect peace, because they trust in him^s.”]

4. He administers to them according to their diversified necessities—

[Amongst them there will be some who are sick, or diseased, or injured by some misfortune: but he knows all their particular cases, and imparts to them the relief which they severally need; “bringing back those which have been driven away, binding up that which has been broken, and strengthening that

^d Ezek. xxxiv. 6.^e Isai. liii. 6.^f Jer. xxiii. 17.^g Rom. iii. 11, 12.^h Phil. iii. 12.ⁱ Ps. cx. 3.^k Luke xv. 5, 6.^l Ezek. xxxiv. 14.^m Luke xv. 16. Isai. lv. 2.ⁿ Isai. xxiv. 6.^o Ps. lxxviii. 25.^p 1 Pet. i. 5.^q John x. 11, 28.^r Ps. xxiii. 2.^s Isai. xxvi. 3.

which is sick^t — — — and never intermitting his care of them, till he has brought them to his fold above^u — — —.]

But our text requires us to take,

II. A more particular view of him as ministering to the weak and needy—

Let us notice then in a more especial manner,

1. His tenderness to the weak—

[The lambs which have been but recently brought forth, may be supposed incapable of proceeding with the flock to any distant pasture. But these “he will gather with his arms, and carry in his bosom.” “He will not despise the day of small things^x.” There is not one in all his flock so weak, but he will pay the most minute attention to its necessities. He who gave so particular a charge to Peter to “feed his *lambs*,” and required this of him as a necessary proof of his love^y, will not himself neglect his lambs; but rather will augment his tender assiduities in proportion as the weakness of the lamb calls for more peculiar care: he will even take it up, and “carry it in his bosom.” In what an endearing view does this place the character of our blessed Lord! — — — How sweetly encouraging is this consideration to those who feel their weakness, and are ready to despond because of it! — — — Let us remember, that when his disciples would have kept persons from troubling him with their little children, he reproved them, and said, “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven^z.” Whether therefore you be children in respect of your natural or spiritual birth, fail not to come to him, assured, that he will bear with your infirmities, and “perfect his own strength in your weakness^a” — — —]

2. His compassion to the afflicted—

[He will have respect to the state of his flock, even as Jacob had, who “would not overdrive them one day, lest they should all die^b.” So our blessed Lord “will gently lead that which is with young.” There are amongst his people many who are weary and heavy-laden with a sense of sin, and bowed down greatly by reason of the difficulties of their way. But to the former he sends a special invitation, with an assured promise of rest^c: and to the latter he authorizes us to declare, that “he will raise them up^d.” In truth, he is pre-eminently distinguished by this, that “he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; but will bring forth judgment unto

^t Ezek. xxxiv. 16.

^u Ps. xxiii. 5, 6.

^x Zech. iv. 10.

^y John xxi. 15.

^z Mark x. 14.

^a 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^b Gen. xxxiii. 13, 14.

^c Matt. xi. 28.

^d Ps. cxlvi. 8.

victory^e. Consider what is implied in these metaphors: a bruised reed is, according to human appearance, incapable of ever sending forth a melodious sound; and smoking flax has, as it were, but a hidden spark of fire, whilst it is sending forth whole clouds of corruption: yet will Christ fan the expiring spark to a flame, and attune the reed to send forth the most heavenly strains. Let none then despond, however destitute they may be of any thing to encourage them from within; but let them “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might^f” — — —]

Let me now ADD a few words,

1. In commendation of this good Shepherd—

[Whence is it that all do not put themselves under his care? Is there any want of love, or tenderness, or power in him? God frequently, by his prophets, called on his rebellious people to testify against him, and to say, whether there had been any want of kindness or care in him: “O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me^g.” “What could I have done more for my people than I have done^h?” So do I now, in the name of this good Shepherd, call upon you all this day, to bear, if you can, your testimony against him. Whom did he ever neglect or despise? Whom that sought him did he ever refuse to receive? Whom that trusted in him, did he ever omit to supply according to his necessities? — — — If then no complaint ever was, or could be made against him from the world, let every heart appreciate his excellency, and every soul commit itself to its care — — —ⁱ]

2. For the augmentation and encouragement of his flock—

[You who have to this hour been going astray, and walking in the way of your own hearts, reflect upon your guilt and danger, and “return now without delay to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls^k” — — — As employed by him, I come now to search you out, and to bring you home to his fold^l — — — O think, how delightful it will be to “hear his voice calling every one of you by name^m,” and “going in and out with you” as long as you shall remain in this dreary wildernessⁿ, and then performing the same office for you in the realms of bliss^o; “O listen not to the voice of strangers” — — — but, follow him — — — that you may be one fold under one Shepherd for ever and ever^p.]

^e Matt. xii. 20. ^f Eph. vi. 10. ^g Mic. vi. 3. Jer. ii. 5, 31. ^h Isai. v. 4.

ⁱ If this were a subject for an *Ordination* or *Visitation* Sermon, the Clergy should be urged to follow the example of this good Shepherd.

^k 1 Pet. ii. 25. ^l Eph. iv. 11. Mark xvi. 15. Jer. xxiii. 4.

^m John x. 3. ⁿ John x. 9. ^o Rev. vii. 17. ^p John x. 5, 9, 16.

DCCCCXXIV.

THE DESPONDING ENCOURAGED.

Isai. xl. 27—31. *Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*

THE human mind is prone to extremes. Before a man comes to the knowledge of himself, he is filled with presumption, and accounts himself as safe as if there were no judgments denounced against him: but, when he begins to feel his guilt and helplessness, he is ready to run into the opposite extreme of despondency, and to account his state as irremediable, as if there were not a promise in the Bible suited to his condition. Such were the feelings of the Jews before their captivity in Babylon, and under the pressure of the troubles which they experienced in their bondage. The prophet, by anticipation, views them as already in Babylon, and reproves the desponding apprehensions which there depressed their souls.

The words I have read, will afford me a fit occasion to set before you,

I. The discouragements which the Lord's people suffer—

It is really no uncommon thing for even pious souls to utter the complaint mentioned in my text. They do this on a variety of occasions:

1. Under a sense of unpardoned guilt—

[Sin, which in an unenlightened state appears so small an evil, to an awakened soul appears “exceeding sinful,” insomuch that he is ready to imagine it can never be forgiven. Hear David under these distressing apprehensions: “O Lord, rebuke

me not in thy wrath, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure! for thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burthen, they are too heavy for me^a.” Even good men will, at times, adopt the language of Cain: “Mine iniquity is greater than can be forgiven^b.” Nor is this to be wondered at: for when we view sin with all its aggravations, and especially as committed against the love of Christ and the strivings of his good Spirit, it does assume a character most odious, and justly deserving of God’s heaviest indignation.]

2. Under the assaults of indwelling corruption—

[These continue long after a man is turned to the Lord. They have indeed received a check; but often, like water obstructed by a dam, they rise and swell the more for the opposition that is made to them. St. Paul’s experience in this respect has kept thousands from utter despondency. How bitterly he complains of “the law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin that was in his members!” From hence, like a man bound with chains to a lothesome carcase, from which he cannot get loose, he cries, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” He indeed saw that deliverance was laid up for him in and through Christ. But many are driven almost to despair: their conflicts with sin and Satan are so frequent and so violent, and sometimes, in appearance at least, so ineffectual, that they are ready to imagine that God has given them up, and that it is in vain for them to contend any more. In this state they are strongly tempted to say, “There is no hope: I have loved strangers; and after them will I go^d.”]

3. Under the pressure of long-continued afflictions—

[These will oppress and overwhelm the strongest man, if he be not succoured from above with strength according to his day. Under these, David frequently complains, as if God had left him and forsaken him: “Lord, why castest thou off my soul? Why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted: thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off^e.” The patient Job^f, the pious Jeremiah^g, the intrepid Elijah, all fainted through their troubles: the two former

^a Ps. xxxviii. 1—4.

^b Gen. iv. 13. See the marginal version.

^c Rom. vii. 23, 24.

^d Jer. ii. 25.

^e Ps. lxxxviii. 14—16.

^f Job iii. 1. and xxvii. 2.

^g Jer. xx. 1—18.

cursed the day of their birth; and the latter, scarcely less excusable, prayed impatiently to God to “take away his life,” in order to liberate him from his troubles^h. Even the Saviour himself, in his afflictions, adopted the language of the Psalmist, “My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaringⁱ?” And no doubt the hands of the strongest will hang down, and the heart of the stoutest faint, if God strengthen them not to drink the cup which men and devils concur to put into their hands.]

But it would not be thus with them, if they used aright,

II. The antidote provided for them in the Scriptures—

In the Scriptures, Jehovah is represented as ordering and overruling all things; and as being a God,

1. Of almighty power—

[There is nothing in the whole universe which did not derive its existence from his all-creating hand; nor is any thing left to its own operations without his sovereign control. Be it either good or evil, it subsists only through his permission; as God himself has told us: “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil. I the Lord do all these things^k.” Even the murderers of our blessed Lord, though perfectly free agents in all that they did, “effected only what the hand and counsel of Jehovah himself had determined before to be done^l.” Be it so then: our guilt lies heavy on our souls; our corruptions work with almost irresistible force; our troubles of divers kinds threaten utterly to destroy us: but is there no power able to deliver? Cannot He who created all things by a word, and spake them into existence, accomplish for us whatever our necessities require? “Is his ear heavy, that he cannot hear; or his arm shortened, that he cannot save^m?” Were we left to the uncontrolled power of our spiritual enemies, we might well despair: but whilst God is seated on his throne, we need never fear but that he will interpose for our relief, if only we cast our care on him. “If we cast our burthen upon him, he will sustain us.”]

2. Of unerring wisdom—

[Because God does not exert his Almighty power for us at the first moment that we implore his aid, we suppose “that our way is hid from him, and our judgment is passed over from him,” or, in other words, that he has utterly cast us off. But

^h 1 Kings xix. 4.

ⁱ Acts iv. 28.

^k Ps. xxii. 1.

^m Isai. lix. 1.

^k Isai. xlv. 7.

we forget that he has gracious designs to accomplish; and that he accomplishes them in ways of which we have no conception, and which appear calculated only to defeat his ends. We measure his wisdom by the scanty line of our own reason; forgetting that “his ways are in the great deep,” and “past finding out” by any finite intelligence: that “there is no searching of his understanding.” Now let this be considered: let the afflicted saint contemplate Jehovah as ordering and overruling every thing for the good of his people and for the glory of his own name: let him say, ‘I have cried long, and not been heard: but perhaps the purposes of Jehovah are not yet ripe for accomplishment: there is more of humiliation to be produced in my soul; more of a preparation of mind for discerning of his mighty hand; more depression to be caused in order to a more glorious exaltation.’ Let him recollect the ways in which Joseph’s dreams were realized; and bear in mind, that the same God sitteth at the helm, and directs the vessel amidst all the storms, “the very storms and winds all fulfilling his sovereign will and pleasure.” This were abundantly sufficient to compose the mind under the most afflictive circumstances that can be imagined: for where there is unerring wisdom to direct, and Almighty power to execute, no difficulty can exist, which shall not be overruled for goodⁿ.]

But let the text declare,

III. The happy state of those who duly improve this antidote—

To wait on God in prayer is necessary, in order to the obtaining of help from him—

[He has said that “he will be inquired of, in order that he may do for us the things that he has promised^o.” This is indispensable in every view: for without it there would be no acknowledgment of him on our part, nor any readiness to give him glory, when he had interposed for our relief. Nor is it only in a way of importunity that we are to wait upon him, but in a way of humble dependence also, and of meek submission to his will. We must leave every thing to his all-wise disposal; “tarrying his leisure,” and “waiting his time, however long the vision may be delayed^p.” “He that believeth must not make haste^q.”]

To all who comply with this requisite, the most effectual relief is secured—

[It is God’s delight to succour his people in the time of need: “He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have

ⁿ Rom. viii. 28.

^o Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^p Hab. ii. 3.

^q Isai. xxviii. 16.

no might he increaseth strength." This, I say, is his habit and delight: and one great end of his delaying the communications of his aid is, to make men more sensible of their dependence on him, and more thankful for his gracious interpositions. Till he vouchsafe his answers to prayer, all human efforts are vain; "even the youths will faint and be weary; and the young men, how strong soever they imagine themselves to be, will utterly fall:" but "they that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength." Like the eagle, when moulting, they may be greatly reduced; but in due season, like him, with his renovated plumage, they shall soar on high, above all the trials and temptations with which they have been oppressed. Their course may be yet long and difficult; the opposition which they may have to encounter may be exceeding violent; but, through the Divine aid, "they shall run and not be weary; they shall *march onward*^r, and not faint."]

ADDRESS—

1. In a way of tender expostulation—

[Such a state of mind as God's people of old indulged, is approved by many, as characteristic of humility. But it is a mark of pride rather, and of unbelief; and it is calculated only to excite God's heavy displeasure. This appears from the manner in which it is here reprov'd. In fact, it argues a forgetfulness of all our principles as men acknowledging a Supreme Being. Have we not known, that there is a God who ordereth all things both in heaven and in earth? Have we not heard, that "without him not so much as a sparrow falleth to the ground?" How then can we imagine that he is inattentive to his suffering or conflicting people, or that he is at a loss for means whereby to effect their deliverance? Have we not heard that "he has given us his only dear Son to die for us? What, then, will he withhold from those who seek him?" Still further; Have we not heard that "he has made with us an everlasting covenant, a covenant ordered in all things and sure?" And is not a supply of all our wants there provided for? Be ashamed, then, my Brethren, that, with such principles, you can give way to any disquietude. You have only to "commit yourselves, and all your concerns, into his hands; and be sure that he will bring to pass" whatever shall eventually advance your best interests.]

2. In a way of affectionate encouragement—

[See to what all your fears are really owing. The pious Asaph was harassed with them, like you: but, on reflection, he said, "This is mine infirmity"^s — — — Be assured, that

^r Bishop Lowth's translation.

^s Ps. lxxvii. 7—10.

not all the powers of earth or hell can prevail against you, if only, in the exercise of faith and patience, you wait on God. Take courage, then, and call yourselves to an account, as David did, for such unworthy fears and such unhallowed depression: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul! and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance and my God^t." If you need some specific promise for your support, take that which God has given to such as are in your very state: "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness^u." Rest on this, and you shall soon add your testimony to that of David: "I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and ordered my goings: and he hath put a new song into my mouth, even praise and thanksgiving to my God^x."]

^t Ps. xlii. 5, 11. and xliii. 5. ^u Isai. xli. 10. ^x Ps. xl. 1—3.

DCCCCXXV.

THE WEAK BELIEVER COMFORTED.

Isai. xli. 10. *Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*

OF the contest between Jehovah and the worshippers of idols, we who have never witnessed the madness of idolaters, have no conception: and, consequently, the pains taken by Jehovah to vindicate his exclusive right to the worship of his creatures appear almost superfluous. But the pertinacity with which idol-worship was upheld, not only amongst the heathen nations around Judea, but even in Judea itself, rendered every possible effort necessary to withstand its influence, and to suppress its growth. Power and authority were for the most part on the side of idolatry; in support of which the bitterest persecutions were set on foot against the adherents of true religion. But Jehovah promises to them his support, and assures them, that, however severely tried for a season, they shall triumph at last.

This is the primary import of our text. But, when we recollect, that there is a spiritual idolatry still prevalent, and that there still exists the same contest between Jehovah and the votaries of this present world, and that his faithful servants are still greatly obstructed in their ways, and painfully persecuted too for their fidelity to him, we shall see that the encouragement in our text is as needful for them, as ever it was for his people of old.

I propose then to set before you,

I. The grounds which the Lord's people have for fear—

The idea of guilt and unworthiness might well come into our view, if we were treating the subject without any reference to the context: but as the fear and dismay mentioned in our text originated only in the power of their enemies, their own inability to withstand them, and the fearful consequences of a defeat, we think it right to confine our observations to those topics.

The Lord's people then have many fears as arising from,

1. The number and power of their enemies—

[It is well known that the world and all its votaries are in direct opposition to the children of God. As Gideon no sooner made a league with Joshua, than all the kings of Canaan confederated to destroy them; so no sooner does any one enter into covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ and submit to him, than the whole world account him a deserter from their cause, and use all their efforts to bring him back to their standard. Even our dearest friends will be the foremost in this warfare; and "our greatest foes be those of our own household." In confirmation of this assertion, we appeal, not to the Scriptures only, but to fact and experience. Let any man set his face to seek the Lord, and all around him will put themselves in array against him, and employ all the arts of persuasion, ridicule, expostulation, and menace, in order, if possible, to divert him from his purpose. Those who, when he was going on in the ways of sin, never uttered a single word of advice to induce him to flee from the wrath to come, no sooner behold him turning into the way of righteousness, than they express the deepest concern about his welfare, and labour to the uttermost to reclaim him from what they account the most egregious folly — —.

In league with them will both the flesh, and the devil be;

the one striving by the violence of its in-dwelling lusts, and the other by the subtlety of his devices, to draw him back into that state of guilt and bondage from which he has just escaped^a — — —

Such enemies, so numerous, so subtle, so inveterate, the Christian scarcely knows how to encounter: and the thought of their combined and continued efforts to destroy him, fills him not unfrequently with terror and “dismay” — — —]

2. His utter inability to withstand them—

The Christian has no idea of the extent of his own impotency to that which is good, till he comes to exert himself in the ways of God. He then finds that “without aid from the Lord Jesus Christ, he can do nothing.” This oftentimes greatly discourages him: “If,” says he, “I have run with footmen, and they have wearied me, how shall I contend with horses^b?” If I am not able to encounter the least of all my enemies, how can I withstand the united force of all? The discouragements arising from this source are the greater, because they so continually recur. The Christian cannot address himself to any duty, but he is constrained from painful experience to acknowledge, that all his sufficiency to do, or to will, or even to think what is good, is of God alone^c — — — Verily, if it were not that he had hope in God, he would sit down in utter despair — — —]

3. The dreadful consequence of a defeat—

[Eternity is at stake; an eternity of bliss or woe; of bliss or woe unutterable, and inconceivable: and to those only who overcome will the prize of victory be assigned, even to those who maintain the conflict to the end, and overcome all the enemies of their souls. And how fearful the alternative! how dreadful the thought of dwelling with everlasting burnings! Can a man open his eyes to such a prospect, and not fear? Is it not sufficient to appal the stoutest heart? True indeed, some are borne up above all such fears, and are “assured, that, when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, they have an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens:” but all are not so privileged; or rather, all do not so fully attain the enjoyment of their privileges: and to them a doubt or suspicion of their ultimate acceptance with God is a source of the most disquieting apprehension.]

But however great be their fears, they may dismiss them all, when they are informed of,

II. The encouragement here afforded them—

Every difficulty that could harass their minds is

^a 2 Pet. ii. 18.

^b Jer. xii. 5.

^c Phil. ii. 13. 2 Cor. iii. 5.

obviated in our text, in which all their fears are anticipated, and their wants supplied. God promises them,

1. His presence—

[Were we left in the power of our enemies without any friend at hand to help us, we might well fear. But God says to the trembling soul, “Fear not; for I am with thee.” Now if but a fellow-creature were with us in a season of difficulty, we should take courage, especially if we knew that he was competent to afford us the protection we desired. How much more then may we be satisfied if Almighty God be with us! In the contemplation of *this*, David says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we *not* fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. God is in the midst of us: we shall not be moved. God shall help us, and that right early. The Lord of Hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our refuge^d.”

But if it be said, God may be “with us” as an enemy, or as an indifferent spectator: therefore it is not a mere persuasion of his presence that will satisfy our minds; he further assures his people of,]

2. His care—

[Believers are “his people; and He is their God:” and in this character will he be with them in all their trials. A stranger may see a person injured, and not feel himself sufficiently interested to interpose for his relief: but a husband, or a father, will not so act: he will feel the injury as done to himself; and will make the cause his own. So will God do for his people, who are authorized in all their troubles to say to him, “Arise, and plead thine own cause.” “Whoso toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye:” and “his eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in behalf of those who trust in him:” and every perfection that he possesses will he put forth for their preservation and protection — — —

Yet, as his people are required to exert themselves, and are apt to be discouraged on account of their extreme weakness, he promises them,]

3. His succour—

[We are told that he will “put strength into his people^e,” and “strengthen them with might by his power in their inward man.” What then need they to fear, when “the arms of their hands are made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob^f?” The weakest of them all may fearlessly adopt the

^d Ps. xlv. 1, 2, 5, 7, 11. ^e Ps. xxix. 11. ^f Gen. xlix. 24.

language of the prophet, "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song: he also is become my salvation^g." Yes; the veriest stripling, with his sling and his stone, may go forth against all the Goliaths in the universe, assured of victory: for "he can do all things, through Christ who strengtheneth him."

Yet, because the Christian's enemies are far too strong for an arm of flesh, and he is apt, notwithstanding the strength imparted to him, to be discouraged; God further engages to aid him with,]

4. His co-operation—

[Fear not; for "I will help thee," says God: "I will help thine infirmities^h." In this expression there is something deserving of especial notice. The term used imports, that when our burthen is so heavy and cumbersome that we cannot with all our exertions support it, God promises that he will take hold of it at the opposite end, and bear it together with us. Be it so then, that our burthen is too heavy for *us*: but is it too heavy for *him* also? "Is there any thing too hard for the Lord?" "If he be for us, not all the powers of earth and hell combined can with any effect exert themselves against usⁱ."

Still, as long as any thing depends on him, the trembling believer cannot dispel his fears: and therefore, to complete the consolation afforded him, God assures him of,]

5. His effectual support—

["I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." What can the believer want more than this; to have the eternal God for his refuge; and to have "underneath him *his* everlasting arms?" "O! happy indeed art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, who is the shield of thy help, and the sword of thine excellency^k?" After this promise, we wonder not at the assurances added to our text, "Behold! all that are incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded; they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. Fear not, *thou worm* Jacob: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small as chaff, so that the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them^l."]

And now, if, after this, any of you entertain unbelieving fears, let me EXPOSTULATE with you, as God himself does—

^g Isai. xii. 2. ^h Rom. viii. 26. See the Greek.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 31. ^k Deut. xxxiii. 27—29. ^l ver. 11—16.

[“ I, even I, am he that comforteth you: Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker; and fearest every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor^m?” Do not so dishonour your Lord and Saviour: but believe him able, believe him willing, to afford you all needful succour, and to “ save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him” — — —]

Yet let me not conclude without adding a few words for the CONVICTION of those who know nothing of such fears as these—

[They who have never had a fear of their state, are at this moment destitute of any scriptural hope: for, What can they know of themselves? What can they know of the Christian warfare? What can they know of the Scriptures of truth? They are altogether in darkness even until now. Can it be supposed that God would use such efforts for the encouragement of his people, if they did not need encouragement? Why did Jehovah so tenderly chide his people of old for their fears, and give them such rich promises of aid, if their situation did not require such supportsⁿ? or why does our blessed Lord still say, “ Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom?” Know of a surety, that the Christian life is attended with many difficulties: and that all the supports and consolations afforded to the believer in the Holy Scriptures, are no more than his necessities require: and, if ever you begin to serve the Lord in truth, you will find the promise in our text more precious to you than gold, and “ sweeter to you than honey, or the honeycomb.”]

^m Isai. li. 12, 13.

ⁿ Isai. xl. 27—31.

^o Luke xii. 32.

DCCCCXXVI.

THE WORM JACOB THRESHING THE MOUNTAINS.

Isai. xli. 14—16. *Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff: thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel.*

TO comfort and encourage the weak is among the first duties of a minister. The command of God to

all his servants is, to strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees, and dispel the fears of the desponding, with an assurance, that their God will come and save them^a. This is an office executed by our blessed Lord, who “ carries the lambs in his bosom, and gently leads them that are with young^b.” The delight which the Father himself also takes in raising up the drooping minds of his people, appears eminently in this, that he frequently addresses them in terms which they, through despondency, would use to characterize themselves; and then under those very characters assures them of his most favourable regards. This is particularly conspicuous in the passage before us, where, addressing his people, he declares,

I. Their character—

[The name of a “ worm ” as applied to our blessed Lord, denotes his low and abject condition during his abode on earth: but, as applied to us, it rather represents our weakness and insufficiency for any thing that is good. In this sense it does indeed most justly mark our character: for there is no creature less capable of active exertion than a worm, or less able to effect any material good: and certainly our inability to perform that which is good is extreme; for we not only cannot of ourselves *do* a good action^d, but we cannot even speak a good word^e, or think a good thought^f. God himself must give us both to will and to do^g, and must work all our good works in us. As *rational* beings we have yet a considerable portion of the Divine image upon us; but as *moral* agents, “ we are very far gone from original righteousness,” and are altogether “ dead in trespasses and sins;” nor have we any more power to renovate ourselves, than “ an Ethiopian has to change his complexion, or a leopard his spots^h.”]

II. Their labours—

[Notwithstanding our utter impotence, we have an immensely difficult work to perform: “ the worm Jacob ” is required to “ thresh mountains,” and to reduce them all to dust: though himself liable to be crushed beneath the smallest clod, he must address himself to this mighty task. There were to all human appearance insurmountable obstacles to the progress

^a Isai. xxxv. 3, 4.

^b Isai. xl. 11.

^c Ps. xxii. 6.

^d John xv. 5.

^e Matt. xii. 34.

^f 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^g Phil. ii. 13.

^h Jer. xiii. 23.

of the Christian Church, which yet it was destined to overcome: so are there mountains in the way of every individual, which yet he must remove, before he can arrive at the Promised Land. What almost insuperable difficulties does *the world* present to him! its pleasures, its maxims, its habits, its company, its friendship, its hatred, its fiercest opposition, must all be regarded as a thing of nought — — — *The flesh* too, with all its affections and lusts, must be mortified and subdued — — — Yea, *Satan himself*, with all the principalities and powers of hell, must be encountered and overcomeⁱ — — — Alas! who is sufficient for these things? Who that is informed of Demas turning aside through love of this present evil world, and of the great Apostle himself crying “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?” must not tremble for himself? But such is the work assigned us; and the weakest amongst us must undertake and execute it, ere he can receive from God the the promised recompence of reward.]

III. Their successes—

[Weak as they are, they all prevail at last. As the Jews, notwithstanding all the obstructions of the Red Sea, the wilderness, and the warlike inhabitants of Canaan, obtained at last the full possession of the promised land, and as the Christian Church triumphed at last over all the power of the Roman empire, so is every believer crowned with victory at last^k — — — The hills and mountains are levelled through his unwearyed exertions^l: and he is “made more than conqueror through Christ who loveth him.” Through faith he overcomes the world^m; by the aid of the Holy Spirit he mortifies the deeds of the bodyⁿ; and by a steady and uniform resistance, he overcomes Satan, so that that wicked fiend is constrained to flee from him, and to yield him the palm of victory^o. The full extent of the triumphs described in our text has never yet indeed been realized in the Church of Christ: we look to a period yet future, when “the mountains shall be as dust, and be scattered as by a whirlwind;” and possibly at that period the triumphs of individuals will be more complete: but even now, by a firm reliance on the promises, we may be enabled to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God^p.” If we had but faith as a grain of mustard-seed, we might say to every mountain that is in our way, “Be thou removed; and it should immediately be cast into the depths of the sea^q.”]

ⁱ Eph. vi. 12. ^k Compare Dan. ii. 34, 35. with the text.

^l Isai. xl. 3—5. ^m 1 John v. 4. ⁿ Rom. viii. 13. Gal. v. 24

^o Jam. iv. 7. 1 John ii. 14. and v. 18.

^p 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^q Matt. xxi. 21.

IV. Their triumphs—

[With such weakness, and such labours, we might well expect the worm Jacob to sink in dejection and despair: but behold he triumphs and exults, “rejoicing in the Lord, and glorying in the Holy One of Israel.” Here it must be remarked, that he does not ascribe his successes to his own arm; he does “not sacrifice to his own net, or burn incense to his own drag;” he gives the glory to Him, to whom alone it is due, even to “Jesus, who is the author and the finisher of his faith^r.” The language of David in reference to his victories exactly suits the Christian in reference to his spiritual triumphs^s. He readily acknowledges whence it is that the weapons of his warfare have accomplished such mighty things, namely, that they have been “mighty *through God*^t,” who “has wrought all his works in him^u,” and “of whom all his fruit has been found^x.” Hence, whilst he acknowledges that “he who hath wrought him to the self-same thing is God^y,” he shouts with devoutest gratitude, “Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ^z!”]

Let us LEARN from hence,

1. The folly of unbelief—

[We are apt to be discouraged by reason of our weakness. But, what if we be as weak as the meanest worm? is God therefore weak, or unable to effect the purposes of his grace? He characterises us as “worms,” on purpose that, “when weak in ourselves, we may be strong in him, and expect him to perfect his strength in our weakness.” Instead therefore of being discouraged on account of our weakness, we should rather “rejoice and glory in it, that the power of Christ may rest upon us,” and be glorified in us^a. We should not, like the unbelieving spies, contemplate the power of our enemies, but should, with believing Joshua, regard them all “*as bread for us*^b,” and, hurling defiance at them all, we should say, “Who art thou, *O great mountain*? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: his hands shall surely finish the work he has begun^c.”]

2. The need of constant exertions—

[Our weakness is no excuse for inactivity; nor does God’s promised aid supersede the necessity of our own exertions. On the contrary, it is that very promise that encourages our

^r Heb. xii. 2.

^s Ps. xviii. 29, 32, 33, 34, 37, 42.

^t 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. and 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^u Isai. xxvi. 12.

^x Hos. xiv. 8.

^y 2 Cor. v. 5.

^z 1 Cor. xv. 57. and 2 Cor. ii. 14.

^a 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

^b Numb. xiv. 3, 9. ^c Zech. iv. 7, 8. with Phil. i. 6.

exertions^d. *The mountains must be threshed by our arm* : “ the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent must take it by force^e.” We must run our race, and fight our fight, and endure unto the end : for it is “ to him only that overcometh, that the crown of glory will be given.” Give not way then to dejection or sloth, but go forth in the strength of the Lord Jesus : and when difficulties appear to be absolutely insurmountable, then go to him, and remind him of his promise, “ I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness^f.” Then you shall find, that “ you can do all things through him strengthening you,” and that “ Satan with all his train shall be shortly and eternally bruised under your feet.”]

^d Phil. ii. 12, 13.

^e Matt. xi. 12.

^f ver. 10. with the text ; and Amos. v. 9.

DCCCCXXVII.

CONSOLATION FOR THE DESPONDING.

Isai. xli. 17, 18. *When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys : I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.*

THE word of God is an inexhaustible source of instruction and comfort : there are passages in it suited to persons in all states and conditions ; but it is calculated more especially for the afflicted and contrite. The passage before us is peculiarly adapted to a desponding soul^a : in its primary sense it is an encouragement to the Jews to trust in God ; in its spiritual meaning it extends to the Church of God in all ages.

I. An afflicted case described—

The people of God are for the most part in a low and afflicted state—

^a God, in ver. 8. reminds his people of his *relation to them* ; assures them of his *presence*, and promises them *strength*, ver. 10 ; *victory*, ver. 14, 15. (“ thou, a worm, shalt thresh the mountains ;”) and *triumph*, ver. 16. Not that they are to expect a continued series of prosperity : they may be reduced to great straits ; but in their lowest state they shall still have ground for the richest consolation.

[All men, if they knew their state, are indeed “poor and needy:” but the generality think themselves “rich and increased with goods.” God’s people, however, *feel* their poverty and need. They are deeply sensible how destitute they are of wisdom, strength, &c.]

They ardently desire to be endued with holiness and comfort—

[Water, as having a cleansing and refreshing quality, may well be understood to mean holiness and comfort; and these are the chief objects of a Christian’s pursuit. They long to be “delivered from the body of sin and death.” They desire to be walking always in the light of God’s countenance. They leave no means untried for the accomplishing of their wishes.]

But they often seem to be labouring in vain; “they seek water, and find none”—

[They strive for victory, but the conflict remains: corruptions still at times harass and defile their souls; deadness and darkness still occasionally return upon them; and the blessedness they pant after seems as distant as ever.]

Their frequent disappointments create much dejection of mind; “their tongue faileth,” &c.—

[“Hope deferred maketh their heart sick.” They faint, as a traveller after a long and fruitless search for water. They begin to conclude that God will not hear their prayers. They fear that he “has forsaken and forgotten them.” Such diligence, disappointment, and despondency were not unknown to David^b.]

But in the text we have,

II. Suitable consolation administered—

A desponding person could not dictate more suitable matter of consolation. The character here given of God is not without great force—

[The desponding person thinks his case too hard to be remedied, and his sins too heinous to be forgiven. He is here reminded what a God he has to deal with. God is “the Lord” and with whom nothing is impossible^c, whose mercy is infinite^d, whose love is unchangeable^e. He is “the God of Israel^f,”

^b Ps. xlii. 1, 2, 3, 7, 9. and Ps. lxxxviii. 1, 3, 6, 7, 14.

^c Jer. xxxii. 27. ^d Exod. xxxiv. 6. ^e Mal. iii. 6.

^f This title is very significant: it is as though God said ‘Remember my servant Jacob, to what a distressing state he was reduced, how he wrestled with me all night in prayer, and yet did not prevail: remember, how I made as though I would leave him; yea, how I lamed him, and thus apparently increased his calamity. But he would not

who, however long he may try his people, will certainly bless them at last. Thus do these titles of God justify that consoling declaration^g.]

The promises here made by God are exactly suited to the case^h—

[“ I will hear:” what an encouragement to continue in prayer! “ I will not forsake thee :” what can the fainting soul desire moreⁱ? “ The most discouraging circumstances shall be no bar to my favours.” “ Apparent impossibilities shall be surmounted by me ^k.” “ Nor shall my communications to you be either small or transient^l.”]

Every one who relies on these promises shall experience consolation from them—

[David bears his testimony that his cries were not in vain^m; and all who plead like him, shall find reason to make his acknowledgmentsⁿ.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are unconcerned about the blessings of salvation—

[The generality know but little of *spiritual* troubles; but their exemption from them is by no means to be desired. They at the same time have no interest in these precious promises: they taste not the rich consolations of the Gospel; and how will “ their tongue fail for thirst ” in the eternal world! Let all then seek to know their spiritual wants. Let them obey

let me go, unless I blessed him. I therefore not only blessed him, but changed his name, and conferred a singular honour upon him by calling my church after his name. Thus did I shew myself *his* God; and thus will I be, yea, thus I *am* the God of all who call upon me after his example.’ Or perhaps it refers rather to Exod. xvii. 1—6. where his supplying of Israel with water is mentioned.

^g Lam. iii. 32.

^h The subject of the soul’s complaint is the very subject of God’s promise. The soul laments ‘ God will not hear me; he has utterly forsaken me; it is absurd for me to cherish a hope; I might as soon expect to find rivers on a lofty mountain, as to possess grace and peace in my soul.’

ⁱ Here is a particular reference to the promise made to Jacob, Gen. xxviii. 15. which he afterwards pleaded with God, Gen. xxxii. 12. and which is renewed to us, Heb. xiii. 5.

^k Though the heart be as a dry and barren wilderness, it shall be refreshed, “ I will open rivers in high places.”

^l They shall be *plenteous* as “ pools and rivers,” and *incessant* as “ springs and fountains.”

^m Ps. xxxiv. 6.

ⁿ Ps. xxx. 8—11.

the invitation of our blessed Lord^o. Let them take encouragement from that gracious offer^p.]

2. Those who are fainting for want of them—

[Many, eminently pious, have been in your state, but none ever waited upon God in vain. These promises cannot possibly fail of being accomplished. From them, as “from wells of salvation, you may draw water with joy.” They shall certainly be fulfilled to you, both here^q, and for ever^r.]

^o John vii. 37, 38.

^p Rev. xxii. 17.

^q Ps. xxxvi. 8.

^r Ps. xvi. 11.

DCCCCXXVIII.

CHRIST'S COMMISSION.

Isai. xlii. 5—7. *Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house.*

“HEAR, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! for the Lord speaketh.” In the preceding verses he speaks to *us*, and calls our attention to “his elect servant,” whom he had appointed to the office of saving man, and qualified to execute it in a manner honourable to himself, and effectual for that end^a. But, in the words of our text, we overhear the almighty Jehovah, the eternal Father, addressing his co-equal, co-eternal *Son*. Ineffable mystery! And what a stupendous privilege to be admitted thus into the council chamber of the Most High! Surely if Moses was commanded to put off his shoes because the place where he stood was sanctified by the Divine presence, it becomes us to express the profoundest reverence, while we listen to the God of heaven giving his commission to his only dear Son respecting the redemption of a ruined world.

^a Compare Matt. xii. 15—21. which shews that the whole of this passage relates to Christ.

In this address to Jesus we see,

I. The commission given him—

Though Christ in his own nature is God equal with the Father, yet as man, and as Mediator, he acts as the Father's servant. In this capacity he received a commission,

1. To undertake the work of our salvation—

[The first covenant which was made with Adam, being broken, it pleased God to make a new covenant; not so much with man, as with his own Son in man's behalf^b.

The terms of this covenant were, that Christ should make his soul an offering for sin, and that he should have the souls of men for his reward^c.

Christ was not only a party in this covenant, but also the Mediator and Surety of it^d. He mediated between God and man; and became a surety, both for God to man, and for man to God. He engaged on man's part, that he should be renewed after the Divine image, and be made obedient to the Divine will; and on God's part he engaged, that his mercy should be extended to every believing penitent.

In this view Christ is said to be given "for a covenant;" because he alone fulfils the conditions of it, and because we, in laying hold on him, become partakers of all its benefits.]

2. To perform it effectually in our behalf—

[Man being blinded by Satan and enslaved by sin, it was necessary that he should be enlightened with divine truth, and liberated from the dominion of his lusts. Accordingly Christ undertook to bring him forth into *light*, and *liberty*. In execution of his office he illuminated the Jewish Church by the revelations made to Moses and the prophets; and since that period he has been "a light to the Gentiles" also, even to the very ends of the earth. Nor is it only by the outward manifestation of his truth that he instructs the world: he teaches men by his Spirit also: he "opens the eyes of the blind," and causes them to "see out of obscurity and out of darkness." By the same Spirit also he enables them to burst the chains with which they are bound, and to come forth from their dungeons in which they are immured. As in delivering Peter from his prison, where he lay sleeping on the night preceding his intended execution, he caused the light to shine in upon him, and his chains to fall off, and the prison doors to fly open of their own accord^e; so now he delivers the souls of men, "turning

^b Gal. iii. 17. Tit. i. 2. Eph. i. 4.

^c Isai. liii. 10—12.

^d Heb. viii. 6. and vii. 22.

^e Acts xii. 4—10.

them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God^f."

All this is Christ's covenanted work: he performs it in consequence of his own engagements: and he will perform it as long as there shall continue one on whose behalf the mighty working of his power shall be necessary.]

In the text we notice,

II. His ability to execute it—

We cannot doubt of this, when we are informed,

1. By whom he was called to it—

[The Father gives in this place a glorious description of his own majesty, as the Creator of heaven and earth, yea of man also, with his animal life, his rational faculties, and his immortal soul. Nor is this description without a very important meaning, as introductory to the commission given to his Son; because it shews us by what high authority his Son acted, and how certainly his undertaking shall be effectual for the end designed.]

"Christ glorified not himself to become an high priest, but was called of God, as was Aaron." The Father "called him in righteousness." In execution of his own righteous purpose, and in accomplishment of his righteous promises, he gave him this commission. He called him when first he entered into covenant with him; and again, when he provided him a body for the discharge of his office; and again, when by an audible voice from heaven he testified, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

From these repeated calls we are assured, that Christ was fully authorized to undertake our cause, and that in all that he did and suffered for us he was accepted of his heavenly Father.]

2. By whom he was assisted in it—

[The trials which Jesus met with from man, though exceeding great, might have been borne: but when he conflicted with all the powers of darkness, and sustained all the weight of his Father's wrath, he must have sunk under the load, had not his almighty Father supported him. But never did he want effectual aid. He complained of dereliction indeed in his most trying hour: but this dereliction related only to the sensible presence of his Father, whereby he might have been comforted: that which was necessary for his support, was never withdrawn: the Father had said to him, "I will hold thine hand, and will keep thee;" and never for one moment was he forgetful of his promise.]

But this promise was not confined to the period of Christ's

^f Acts xxvi. 18.

existence upon earth: it includes also a concurrence with him in his work, even to the end of the world. What then can be wanting, when the Father and the Son are ever combining their efforts for the salvation of men? None, however blind, need to despair of beholding the light; none, however rivetted in bonds, need despair of attaining liberty.]

We cannot close this subject without suggesting some obvious REFLECTIONS—

1. How deeply are we interested in the covenant of grace!

[It is generally imagined, that the mysterious engagements between the Father and the Son are merely speculative points, in which mankind are little interested. But what can be conceived more interesting than the offices of Christ, or his ability to fulfil them? Would persons destitute of vision, or imprisoned and under sentence of death, feel no interest in the inquiry, whether they could find relief, or whether one professing to offer it were able to fulfil his word? On the covenant of redemption rests all our hope. If Christ be not authorized to save us, his good-will towards us will be to little purpose: if he be not qualified, his endeavours will be all in vain.

Let us then acquaint ourselves with the proper grounds of our hope. Let us consider the parties contracting, and the engagements which they have respectively entered into; and let us lay hold on that “covenant as all our salvation and all our desire^s.”]

2. What encouragement have all to embrace that covenant!

[Are any persons ready to apprehend that they are excluded from it as unworthy? Behold the provisions of the covenant itself! See for whose benefit it is particularly designed! Are we not only in darkness, but blind also? Are we enslaved, and so fast bound in prison that we cannot come forth? We then are the very persons for whose sake the Son of God became incarnate, and for whose relief both his and his Father's honour are mutually pledged.

Let none then listen to such unfounded apprehensions; but rather let every one remember, that Christ is given for a covenant to the whole Gentile world; and that the more desperate our condition be, the more will God be glorified in our acceptance of his proffered mercy.]

DCCCCXXIX.

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE OPENED.

Isai. xlii. 16. *I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.*

GOD has fore-ordained every thing which he himself will do^a; and he has been gradually unfolding his designs from the beginning. The restoration of the Jews from Babylon, and the calling of the Gentiles into the Church, were very wonderful events, but in them the prediction before us was fulfilled: it receives a further accomplishment yet daily. We may take occasion from it to observe,

I. God's dealings are mysterious—

The dispensations of his *providence* have been at all times dark—

[How ill-judged (according to human estimate) was the direction given to the Israelites at their departure from Egypt^b! Yet it eventually led to their more complete deliverance^c. How strange do their long wanderings in the wilderness appear! Yet God conducted them by the right way^d. The present dispersion of the Jews shall enhance the mercy and the glory of their restoration. Their degradation shall issue in their fulness^e.]

The dispensations of his *grace* are equally inscrutable—

This is seen in the *first quickening* of men from their spiritual death—

[God sets their sins in array before them. He charges home their guilt upon their consciences. He threatens them with his eternal wrath and indignation. Who would conceive that these were tokens of his love? How little did the three thousand, when pricked to the heart, imagine that joy was so nigh at hand^f! How little could the jailor, when about to commit suicide, have supposed that his terror was the first dawn of mercy to his soul^g! Thus are many still brought to Christ “in a way which they knew not” — —]

^a Acts xv. 18. ^b Exod. xiv. 2, 3. ^c Exod. xiv. 17, 23, 28.

^d Ps. cvii. 7. Deut. viii. 2.

^e Rom. xi. 12, 31.

^f Acts ii. 37.

^g Acts xvi. 27—29.

It further appears in their *subsequent spiritual life*—

[Men usually expect to be led on in a way of peace and joy. But God often leaves them to feel the depravity of their own hearts. He sometimes permits them to be “in heaviness through manifold temptations.” He suffers also many heavy calamities to befall them. They seem, at times, as though they should be overwhelmed. They not unfrequently are brought to the borders of despair. Yet these are ways which God takes to humble and to prove them. Who could have thought that Peter’s fall should be overruled for good? Yet perhaps nothing else would ever have purged out his self-confidence. The buffetings of Satan were earnestly deprecated by Paul^h; yet were they necessary to prevent the workings of prideⁱ. How true is that observation of the Psalmist^k—. ‘The more we contemplate his dealings with his people, the more shall we exclaim with the Apostle^l—!’]

In every dispensation, especially as it respects his people, we may say,

II. His intentions are merciful—

The perplexities of his people are often very great : but God has gracious designs in all^m. We may see this remark exemplified in the case of Job—

[How heavy and accumulated were the trials that came on him! He himself, in his haste, accused God of crueltyⁿ. But the end shewed that God sent those trials in love^o.]

The case of Joseph also deserves attention in this view—

[God intended to make him lord over his brethren^p. But, instead of being advanced, he was sold as a slave^q. Afterwards he was imprisoned as guilty of a capital offence^r. He was above twenty years without ever hearing of his brethren. Yet we see at last the designs of God accomplished by the very means which appeared most calculated to defeat them.]

The same mercy is discoverable in God’s dealings with all his afflicted people—

[He suffers their path to be for a time dark and intricate. But he invisibly directs and manages their concerns. He gradually removes their difficulties, and clears up their doubts. If he shut them up under the law, it is that they may embrace

^h 2 Cor. xii. 8.

ⁱ 2 Cor. xii. 7.

^k Ps. lxxvii. 19.

^l Rom. xi. 33. ^m Jer. xxix. 10, 11.

ⁿ Job x. 3, 16.

^o Job xlii. 12, 13. with Jam. v. 11.

^p Gen. xxxvii. 6—10.

^q Gen. xxxvii. 28.

^r Gen. xxxix. 17—20.

the offers of his Gospel^s — — — If he prune them as a vine, it is to augment their fruitfulness^t. If he refine them as with fire, it is to advance the purification of their souls^u. Thus he constrains them to acknowledge with the Psalmist^x—.]

They indeed are often ready to doubt his love. But,

III. His regards are permanent—

God did not forget his people when they were in Babylon, neither will he now “forsake” those who trust in him—

[He may appear for a season to have forsaken them^y. They may be left to complain as though he had quite forgotten them^z. But his having made them his people is a reason why he will not recede from his gracious purposes^a. The Apostle was confident that God would complete his works of grace^b.]

He will continue firm and unchangeable in his regards to them—

[The prophets declare this in the strongest terms^c. St. Paul abundantly confirms their testimony^d. He commends this truth to us as a ground of cheerful confidence in the most trying seasons^e.]

INFER—

1. How careful should we be not to pass a hasty judgment on the Lord's dealings!

[We are too ready under trials to exclaim with Jacob^f—. Yet the trials we complain of may be, as in his case, the necessary means of our preservation. It is the part of a believer to wait with patience for the issue^g.”]

2. How safely may we commit ourselves to God's disposal!

[God alone knows what is best for us. He knows, too, how to accomplish his designs in the best manner. Let us therefore commit all our concerns to him^h. Let us lie as clay in the potter's handsⁱ. In whatever distress we be, let us follow the prophet's direction^k—.]

^s Gal. iii. 23, 24.

^t John xv. 2.

^u Mal. iii. 3.

^x Ps. xcvii. 2.

^y Isai. liv. 7, 8.

^z Isai. xlix. 14—16.

^a 1 Sam. xii. 22.

^b Phil. i. 6.

^c Isai. liv. 9, 10. Jer. xxxi. 37. and xxxii. 40.

^d Rom. xi. 29.

^e Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

^f Gen. xlii. 36.

^g Isai. xxviii. 16.

^h Ps. xxxvii. 5.

ⁱ Jer. xviii. 6.

^k Isai. l. 10.

DCCCCXXX.

GOD'S CARE FOR HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. xliii. 1—3. *Now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not : for I have redeemed thee ; I have called thee by thy name : thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee : when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned ; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.*

IT is almost impossible for any one to read the Holy Scriptures with attention, and not to notice the very remarkable manner in which many of the richest promises are introduced. God seems, in them, determined to magnify his own grace ; and to shew, that “ where sin hath abounded, his grace shall much more abound^a.” Let any one read the two last verses of the preceding chapter, and then pass on to the promise which I have just read ; and he will see this illustrated in a very striking point of view — — — The Jews, to this day, experience the mercy and the faithfulness of God in his wonderful preservation of them, in order to a richer display of his goodness towards them than they have ever yet known^b. And all the servants of Jehovah, in every age, may be assured of similar protection, in order to their present and eternal welfare.

In opening the words before us, we will notice,

I. What is here supposed respecting the people of God—

[It is taken for granted that they shall be a suffering people, according to what is spoken by the Prophet Zephaniah : “ I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people^c.” In a greater or less degree this is the state of all ; they have to pass through deep waters, and even, as it were, through the fire itself, in the service of their God. Sometimes they are afflicted by persecution, and sometimes by temptation ; for both to men and devils are they objects of inveterate hostility. From the days of Cain to this very hour,

^a Rom. v. 20.

^b ver. 4—7.

^c Zeph. iii. 12.

have “those who were born after the flesh persecuted those who were born after the Spirit^d,” nor can any “who will live godly in Christ Jesus hope to escape” their virulent assaults^e. And where is there a child of God whom that great “adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, does not labour to devour^f?” There is not one who has not “some thorn in the flesh, some messenger of Satan to buffet him^g.” Look at all the most favoured servants of the Lord—at Job, and Heman, and Asaph, and David, and Paul—and you will find them all “chosen in the furnace of affliction, even as our blessed Lord himself, who was pre-eminently a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief^h.” Indeed there is a necessity for this; because there is in all the servants of God much dross, which needs the fire of affliction to purge it away; and it is in the furnace that they learn the evil of their own hearts, and the power and efficacy of divine grace: it is under tribulation chiefly, that they acquire “patience and experience, and a hope that shall never make them ashamedⁱ.”]

But, however painful their state, they have abundant consolation in,

II. What is here promised to them—

[God will be with his people under all their trials: as he has said, “I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him.” He will be with his people both by the manifestations of his presence and the communications of his grace; so that, under their severest afflictions, they shall have abundant support. Remarkable is that expression of the Psalmist, “Thou shalt hide them *in the secret of thy presence*^k.” The man that is in the presence of his God, and has the light of his countenance lifted up upon him, is inaccessible to his enemies, and may laugh at all their assaults. See Paul and Silas in prison, under circumstances as painful as could well be inflicted on them; yet, behold, they are singing praises to God at midnight. And see the Hebrew Youths in the furnace into which an infuriated tyrant had cast them: “not so much as a hair of their head was singed, or even the smell of fire had passed on them.” Such are the interpositions of God in behalf of all his faithful servants, that “where their afflictions have abounded, their consolations have much more abounded^l.” The very waves which desolated all the world besides, bore up the ark, and carried it to a place of safety. And so shall the sea itself afford a passage to all the “ransomed of the Lord to pass over,” in the way to the land of promise^m. But let not this be taken

^d Gal. iv. 29.

^g Ps. xci. 15.

^k Ps. xxxi. 20.

^e 2 Tim. iii. 12.

^h Isai. liii. 3.

^l 2 Cor. i. 5.

^f 1 Pet. v. 8.

ⁱ Rom. v. 5.

^m Isai. li. 10.

upon my word. Let David speak, from actual experience : "Thou, O God, hast proved us ; thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the net : thou laidest affliction upon our loins. Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads : *we went through fire and through water* ; but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy placeⁿ."]]

Of the fulfilment of this promise we can entertain no doubt, when we consider,

III. The ground upon which the promise is made—

[It is pleasing to observe with what satisfaction God contemplates the relation in which he stands to his people, and with what delight he expatiates upon it : "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel ; Fear not, for I have redeemed thee ; I have called thee by thy name ; thou art mine. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." Here is abundant security to us for the accomplishment of every word that God has spoken. For he takes an interest in his people, such as a man feels in reference to his dearest possessions. He puts them, we will say, into the furnace. But will he leave them there without any concern about them ? No : "he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver," to watch the process, and to bring them forth the very instant that his gracious designs are wrought upon them ; that so they may come forth "as vessels of honour, meet for their Master's use^o." Are they "a vineyard which his right hand has planted ?" "he will keep it, and water it every moment : lest any hurt it, he will keep it night and day^p." No parent can sympathize with his afflicted child more tenderly than he did with his people under their trials : "In all their affliction he was afflicted : and the angel of his presence saved them : in his love and in his pity he redeemed them ; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old^q." In a word, they *are* his children ; and *therefore* he enters so affectionately into all their concerns : "Is not Ephraim my dear son ? is he not a pleasant child ? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still : *therefore* my bowels are troubled for him : I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord^r."]]

INFER—

1. What consolation does the Gospel of Christ afford !

[In the Old Testament we have those very promises of which we have spoken. But it is the Gospel which gives us

ⁿ Ps. lxvi. 10—12.

^o Mal. iii. 3.

^p Isai. xxvii. 3.

^q Isai. lxiii. 9.

^r Jer. xxxi. 20.

the full insight into them. We behold in the Old Testament the redemption of Israel from Egypt, and their ultimate establishment in the land of Canaan. But these were a mere shadow of the redemption that has been wrought for us by Christ, and of those spiritual mercies which are vouchsafed to us in our way to the Canaan that is above. These are, above all, to be noticed. These give us the true insight into the mystery of the burning bush^s. Not the Church at large only, but every true believer is that burning bush, in whom God shall to all eternity be glorified. "Tribulation is appointed for us as our way^t:" but most glorious shall be our end^u.]

2. How needful for us is it that we obtain an interest in Christ!

[It is in Christ alone that these promises are made to us^x. If we are in him, the promises, and all that they contain, are ours^y." Let us be able to say with David, "The Lord is my shepherd:" and then we may safely add, "When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy (pastoral) rod and staff, they comfort me^z."]

^s Exod. iii. 2.

^t Acts xiv. 22.

^u Rev. vii. 14, 15.

^x 2 Cor. i. 20.

^y 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

^z Ps. xxiii. 1—4.

DCCCCXXI.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE TRUE CHRISTIAN.

Isai. xliiii. 4. *Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee.*

FEW have any conception how close the analogy is between God's dealings with his people of old, and his conduct towards his Church and people in the present day. In truth, we scarcely know how to admit that God will manifest such condescension to us as he did to them. But it can never be thought that the Christian Church is less privileged than the Jewish; or that God will manifest less grace towards those whom he has redeemed through the blood of his Son, than he did towards those whom he delivered from a mere temporal captivity. True, indeed, his interpositions may be, and in fact are, less *visible*; but they are not a whit less *real* than in the days of old. Connect this chapter with the last two verses of the preceding chapter; and you will see how God

still magnifies his grace and mercy towards us, when we have reason to expect nothing but his wrathful indignation^a. So, in like manner, we may behold in the text itself to what an exalted state the true Christian is raised. We cannot but acknowledge the truth of God's appeal to *them* in the words which I have just read; and the same expressions are equally applicable to his people in every age and place. If we understand the passage aright, we may clearly see in it *the rise and progress of the Christian's calling*. Let us notice,

I. The rise of the Christian's calling—

Whence and how were the Jews exalted to their unrivalled eminence?

[Were they selected by God either for their number or their superior goodness? No: they were "the fewest of all people," and equal to any in depravity. It was altogether an act of sovereign grace when "God chose them, and set his love on them, and made them his peculiar people:" "He loved them, because he would love them^b" — — — Hence he reminds them of their origin, under the image of a child just born into the world of Heathen parents, without any one to administer to its necessities: "Thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite. And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee: thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the lothing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live^c." And by Isaiah he reminds them of this saying, "Look to the rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged: remember Abraham your father, and Sarah that bare you; for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him^d." Such was their state when God chose them to himself, "to be a peculiar people to him, above all upon the face of the earth;" and set them

^a Examine the passage in this view; and compare it with ver. 1. which marks distinctly how they came to be "precious in God's sight."

^b See Deut. vii. 6—8. and ix. 4—6.

^c Ezek. xvi. 3—6.

^d Isai. li. 2, 3.

apart, as “his peculiar treasure^e,” and “his jewels^f,” and “his portion and inheritance^g.” Thus we see clearly whence their greatness arose; and how it came to pass that “they were exalted above all the nations of the earth, in name, and in honour, and in praise^h.”]

And whence is it that any of *us* are “precious in God’s sight?”

[Is it on account of any superior goodness in us that God has chosen us? Surely there is not a man on earth so presumptuous as to affirm, or so ignorant as to imagine, that God chose him, in preference to others, on account of his own superior worth and excellence. I have said that there is, especially in reference to this matter, a strict analogy between the Jews and us; and St. Peter marks it with peculiar force, quoting the very words which I have before cited, as applied by Moses to the Jewish people, and applying them to Believers under the Christian dispensation: “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar peopleⁱ.” Beyond all doubt we are as much debtors to the sovereign grace of God as ever the Jews were; and it is wonderful that so many well-disposed people should be averse to acknowledge it. We see, readily enough, how predestination and election operated in relation to the Jews; and yet we find it difficult to acknowledge their operation in reference to ourselves. But “God has chosen *us* in Christ, before the foundation of the world;” and “has predestinated *us* to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself^k,” precisely as he chose *them*, and predestinated *them* to the enjoyment of their privileges. To the grace of God alone we must trace it, if any of us be “precious in God’s sight^l,” we must acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as “the Author of our faith, no less than the finisher^m,” and “when the top-stone shall be brought forth, to complete God’s temple in our hearts,” we, like all the prophets and apostles that have been before us, must cry, “Grace, grace unto itⁿ!”]

The rise of the Christian’s calling having been pointed out, let us proceed to trace,

II. The progress of it—

The advancement of God’s people now corresponds exactly with that of his ancient people;

1. In honour—

^e Exod. xix. 5, 6.

^f Mal. iii. 17.

^g Deut. xxxii. 9.

^h Deut. xxvi. 18, 19.

ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^k Eph. i. 4, 5.

^l Eph. ii. 8, 9.

^m Heb. xii. 2.

ⁿ Zech. iv. 6, 7.

[Since the Jews had been precious in God's sight, they were honourable. They were honourable *in themselves*, as being elevated to a higher character than any other people in the universe. What other people were ever distinguished with such a code of laws as they^o? or in what other country under heaven did persons attain to an equality with the Patriarchs in righteousness and true holiness? They were honourable also *in God's sight*: for they were watched over by him, as if there had not been any other people in the world; and were regarded by him altogether as the "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." *In the sight of surrounding nations*, also, they were honourable; for they all confessed that "God was with them of a truth; and every Jew could exult over them, saying, Their rock is not as our rock, our enemies themselves being judges^p."

The same elevation is vouchsafed to God's people, also, at the present day. *In themselves*, they are "made partakers of a divine nature^q," and are "changed into the Divine image^r," and "shine as lights in a dark world^s." *In God's estimation*, they are "his dear children," the very spouse of his only-begotten Son, "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," preserved by him here "as the apple of his eye," and reserved for thrones and kingdoms in a better world. And *in the eyes of an ungodly world*, too, are they honourable. For though the world may treat them as "the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things," fit only to be swept away in the most ignominious manner from the face of the earth, and even to be sacrificed to devils, yet do they reverence them in their hearts; even as "Herod feared John, because he was a holy and just man^t." An ungodly man feels restraint in the presence of a true Christian, and cannot give loose to his wicked propensities as he would do in his absence. However an ungodly man may hate and revile a true Christian, he has a secret wish in his heart that he could exchange conditions with him, especially in the eternal world. However averse a man may be to live the life of the righteous, there is no one who would not be glad to "die his death, and to have his last end like his." Say, then, whether this be not to be truly "honourable?" Verily, not a king upon his throne is so truly honourable as the man who is brought into vital union with the Lord Jesus Christ, and sanctified in his soul by the Spirit of the Living God.]

2. In happiness—

["Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and the

^o Deut. iv. 7, 8.

^p Deut. xxxii. 31.

^q 2 Pet. i. 4.

^r Eph. iv. 24.

^s Phil. ii. 15.

^t Mark vi. 20.

sword of thine excellency^u?" If this was spoken of the Jews because of the love which God bare to them, what must be said of *us*, whom "he has loved, even as he loves his only-begotten Son^x?" Who can tell what it is to be favoured with "the spirit of adoption?" or what to "have the witness of the Spirit witnessing with our spirit that we are the children of God?" Who can tell what it is to "have the love of God shed abroad in the heart," and to "be filled with the Spirit?" Verily, these things constitute "that white stone, on which is that new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that hath received it^y." It is, in fact, an earnest and foretaste of heaven itself^z. See how the love of God to his ancient people was displayed: how "God gave Egypt for their ransom, yea, and Ethiopia and Seba too^a!" Whole nations were of no more account with God than the dust of the summer threshing-floor, if they stood in the way of their welfare^b. And so shall it be again, when they shall be restored to their own land: "the nation and kingdom that will not serve them shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted^c." And let it not be thought that God will do less for his Church and people at this day. No, truly: "the gates of hell shall never prevail against them:" "no weapon formed against them shall ever prosper:" but every enemy, and "Satan himself at the head of them, shall be put under their feet shortly:" and so attentive will God be to their welfare, that every dispensation, whether of his providence or grace, shall be ordered with a view to it, and "all things, however unfavourable their aspect, be overruled to promote it^d.]

Two things, then, I ask of you, my beloved Brethren:

1. Endeavour to form a just estimate of your high calling—

[St. Paul calls this "a holy calling^e," a heavenly calling^f," yea, "the high calling of God in Christ Jesus^g:" and the least reflection on what has been already spoken must convince you, that "the riches of it" are inestimable, incomprehensible, "unsearchable^h." Christians live far below their privileges. They are *too exclusively* occupied (I do not say *too intensely*), in viewing their remaining imperfections, and the greatness of the work that still remains to be wrought in them. They do not soar in contemplating the wonders which God has already

^u Deut. xxxiii. 29. ^x John xvii. 23, 26. ^y Rev. ii. 17.

^z Eph. i. 13, 14. ^a ver. 3.

^c Isai. lx. 12.

^d Rom. viii. 28.

^b Isai. xli. 11—16.

^f Heb. iii. 1.

^g Phil. iii. 14.

^e 2 Tim. i. 9.

^h Eph. i. 18. and iii. 8.

wrought for them, and those which he has pledged himself yet further to accomplish. Hence they are kept in a low state of bondage, instead of being “brought into the full liberty of the children of God.” But read the Epistles of St. Paul, my Brethren: read, especially, his prayers, and see how he soars in his contemplation of God’s unbounded mercies, and of the Christian’s exalted privilegesⁱ. It is by such meditations that we shall rise above all our spiritual enemies, and by such views we shall “be filled with all the fulness of God^k.” O, Brethren, know your privileges as believers in Christ; and live in the sweet enjoyment of them: for there are no bounds to *the honour and the happiness* which God will confer on those who are “precious in his sight” as his redeemed people.]

2. Endeavour, also, to walk worthy of it—

[This was Paul’s earnest entreaty to the Ephesian and Philippian Churches, when he was a prisoner at Rome. He did not desire their interposition to get him liberated: all he had to request of them was, that “their conversation should be such as became the Gospel of Christ^l.” And indeed this was the great object of his ministry at all times: “Ye know,” says he to the Thessalonian Church, “how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory^m.” In the same manner would I now entreat you; yea, as a father with his children, would I charge you, that ye “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good workⁿ,” and “adorning the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things^o.” Only reflect on your high privileges; and then say, “what manner of persons ye ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness^p.” I conclude with that inspired admonition, “As he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy^q.”]

ⁱ Eph. i. 3—14.

^k Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^l Eph. iv. 1. Phil. i. 27.

^m 1 Thess. ii. 11, 12.

ⁿ Col. i. 10.

^o Tit. ii. 10.

^p 2 Pet. iii. 11.

^q 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

DCCCCXXXII.

THE SAINTS ARE WITNESSES FOR GOD.

Isai. xliiii. 12. *Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God.*

GOD is a jealous God, and cannot endure that any other should be put in competition with him. Hence he takes frequent occasion to reprove the idolatry

into which his people were ever prone to relapse. He shews them the folly of cutting down a tree, and kindling a fire with part of the wood, and roasting their food with it, and then fashioning another part of the same tree into the image of a man, and bowing down to it as a god. He challenges them and all the world to bring any single instance of such senseless idols having ever revealed things that were long past and forgotten, or of their having ever foretold future events, or effected for their votaries any signal deliverance. He appeals to them, that HE had done these things for them; and that therefore they themselves were witnesses for him, that he was the only true God.

A similar appeal may properly be made to the people of God at this day. They have within themselves very convincing proofs of his exclusive right to universal adoration;

I. In what he has taught them—

He has given them such views of Divine truth as they could not possibly obtain from any other quarter. He has shewn them,

1. The depravity of their nature—

[Others may profess in words that they are fallen creatures: but who ever learned, from mere study, or the instructions of man, that his “heart was deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked?” Who ever *so* learned it, as really to “abhor himself in dust and ashes?” — — — But God does teach all his people this lesson — — — and all who have learned it, are *therefore* living witnesses of his almighty power and grace.]

2. The excellency of Christ—

[To compliment Christ with honourable titles is common enough. But who can open a man’s eyes, so that he shall “behold the glory of God in *his* face?” — — — Yet this is done for all the Lord’s people. To every one of them “Christ is truly precious” — — — In this respect therefore they are witnesses that their teacher is the omnipotent Jehovah.]

3. The beauty of holiness—

[However some particular virtues may be admired in the world, the holiness which the Gospel requires is odious in their eyes. Penitence is considered as melancholy; devotion, as hypocrisy; zeal for God, as enthusiasm; and an earnest

expectation of glory, as consummate pride and presumption. And who can alter their views? Not an Apostle, nor even an angel from heaven. They might be silenced; but nothing less than Omnipotence can so change their sentiments, as to make them in love with a spiritual and heavenly life. But the Child of God sees that such a life is the perfection of bliss, a very heaven upon earth — — — and herein also is a witness, that the God whom he serves is the only true God.]

But the Children of God are also living witnesses of his power and Godhead,

II. In what he has done for them—

We acknowledge the creation to be an evidence that the Maker thereof is God: and so likewise is the work which God hath wrought in his saints.

1. He has created them anew—

[The change that takes place in conversion is not an outward and partial, but an inward and universal, change. It is “a new birth,” a “renovation of the inward man after the image of God” — — — But where is the power that can effect this? Let philosophy try her powers; let reason exert herself: “the old man,” the corrupt principles of nature, will laugh at them, and defy their utmost exertions — — — But is not this change actually wrought in thousands? We grant, that in many who have professed to have experienced it, it is but very imperfectly produced; yea, and that many who think it has been wrought in them only deceive their own souls: but all the Apostles were not like Judas; nor are all professors of religion hypocrites. Take then the upright and consistent Christian, and tell me whether any power on earth can produce such a character? — — — if not, he is a witness for God, that HE alone is worthy of our hope and dependence.]

2. He has elevated them above the world—

[There is among the professors of religion so great a diversity of attainment, and we are so little able to judge respecting the secret experience of their hearts, that we cannot with any certainty form our estimate of the Christian character from what we see around us: we must go to the inspired volume, and take *that* as the only standard of Christian experience. Now we know that Christians are *there* represented as “not being of the world, any more than Christ himself was of the world:” and we see *there* examples of persons altogether “crucified to the world,” to its cares, its pleasures, and to every thing that is in it. That there are but few Christians in the present day who have arrived at the Scripture standard, we confess with grief and shame; and it will be well if many of

them do not find themselves awfully mistaken, when they shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ: but the truth is the same, whether few or many experience it; and it is a certain fact, that every Child of God is delivered from the love of this present evil world — — — and the fewness of those, whose lives correspond with their professions, tends to prove, rather than to disprove, the point we have affirmed. For, where shall we find one person truly elevated above the world, unless amongst those who have been born of God? Some may be found who are dissatisfied with the world, and who from age or other circumstances find no relish for it: but if they were put into a capacity to enjoy the world as they once did, their love of it would be found as strong as ever. We defy the whole world to produce *one*, who by the mere powers of reason has been raised above the world; and this is a decisive proof that the deadness to the world which true Christians experience, is the work of an Almighty arm.]

3. He has filled them with spiritual peace and joy—

[The peace and joy which the unconverted man possesses, will vanish at the prospect of death and judgment: or if under the influences of deluded hopes they retain a confidence, the peace flowing from that confidence is as different from that which is “the fruit of the Spirit,” as the ravings of a maniac are from the suggestions of sober reason — — — But the true Christian has “a peace that passeth all understanding,” and “a joy that is unspeakable and glorified” — — — Whence does he obtain this? Who but God can give it him? or who can take it away, when God has given it him? Here then again is he a witness for God, that *his* power and grace are infinite.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who idolatrously exalt the creature—

[See the challenge given by God himself^a: produce the people that have obtained from any but Jehovah, either this knowledge, or this experience. We defy the whole universe. “Bring forth your witnesses, that you may be justified: or else hear ye, and acknowledge, that what we have affirmed is truth.” The more you examine the pretensions of any who profess to have acquired these things by their own power, the more evidence you will have, that God alone can produce them in the souls of men — — —]

2. Those who profess to be Christians indeed—

[Remember that it is your duty and office to be “witnesses for God.” You are to be “as lights in a dark world, and as a city upon a hill.” Be then *voluntary* witnesses. Wicked men,

^a ver. 8, 9.

and even the devils themselves, are in some sense witnesses for him: they attest, though against their will, that his representations of the human heart are true, and that he is a God of infinite patience, majesty, and power. But you are intentionally to make your light shine before men, and to convince them by the holiness of your lives that "God is with you of a truth." Be also *steadfast* witnesses. You will find many temptations to "put your light under a bushel;" but you must be resolute in glorifying God, whether by life or by death. Further, be also *consistent* witnesses. The world will judge, not by your words, but by your actions: and if they see these to be at variance with each other, they will rather harden themselves in their infidelity, and adduce your testimony as adverse to God. Look to it then that ye walk in all things "holily, justly, and unblameably;" and "that they who are on the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you."

Lastly, for your encouragement, think what *witnesses* ye shall one day be for God *in heaven!* How will ye there proclaim and manifest his power and grace! — — — O blessed day! Look forward to it with joy; and prepare for it by increasing zeal in the service of your God.]

DCCCCXXXIII.

GOD'S KINDNESS TO HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. xliii. 20. *I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen.*

THE mercies of God which are daily, and, as it were, hourly renewed, demand at our hands a constantly increasing tribute of praise and thanksgiving. Former benefits are not to be forgotten: yet it is allowable, and even proper, that those which have been recently vouchsafed to us should so occupy the mind, as, for a time, almost to exclude from our minds the immediate recollection of those which have been formerly bestowed. The Prophet Jeremiah says, "Behold, the days come, that they shall no more say, The Lord liveth, which brought up the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, but the Lord liveth which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries whither I had driven them^a."

^a Jer. xxiii. 7, 8.

Thus in the verses before our text, God says, "Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old: behold, I will do a new thing." The particular thing here predicted, is, the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, together with their preservation in the dry and barren wilderness, through which they must pass in their way to Judea. But that deliverance would never have been represented as so superior to that which they had experienced from Egypt, had it not typified a far more glorious redemption, which they were taught to expect through the intervention of the Messiah. *This* it is (even the spiritual redemption by Christ, together with the aids and consolations of the Holy Spirit) to which the text principally refers; and for which, not "the owls and dragons" of the wilderness, but the more stupid and ferocious Gentiles "shall honour God" for ever.

In discoursing on these words, we shall consider,

I. The designation given to God's people—

The minds of many almost revolt at the very mention of the word "elect," or "chosen." But though we by no means approve of bringing forward the subject of election on every occasion, yet, as it is frequently mentioned in the Scriptures, and strongly asserted in the Articles of our Church, we ought not to pass over it, when it comes plainly and unavoidably before us. The word "chosen" is used in the text,

1. As a term of distinction—

[No one can doubt but that God's people are often spoken of by the term of "God's elect:" the only doubt is, what that term imports. Now all will confess that it imports a choice of nations to the enjoyment of *national privileges*. In this sense God chose the Jewish nation, and took them out from the midst of a people greater and mightier than they, and gave them his statutes and judgments, when all other nations were left to follow their own ways. And this he did, not on account of any merit in them, but purely on account of his own good pleasure, irrespective of any goodness in them, either seen or foreseen^b. It is no less clear, that the term is also applied to *individual persons* chosen to *particular situations* of trust and honour.

^b Deut. vii. 7, 8. and ix. 4—6.

Levi's appointment to the priesthood^c, David's to the government of Israel^d, and Saul's to the apostleship^e, are unquestionable proofs of God's having exercised his own sovereign will in the selection of individuals to posts of temporal dignity; I may add too, of unspeakable spiritual advantage. These things being admitted, it seems strange that any one can doubt, but that the term "elect" denotes yet further a choice of *particular persons to eternal life*. The people of God are not merely called "elect," but are expressly said to have been "from the beginning chosen *unto salvation*, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth^f." And for them in particular is heaven reserved; inasmuch that "Jesus Christ himself cannot grant heaven to any but those, for whom it was before prepared of the Father^g."]

2. A term of endearment—

[This seems the more particular view in which the name is given to God's people in the text. Just as, in reference to his dear Son, God says, "Behold my servant whom I uphold, *mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth*^h," so he speaks of his people here, as feeling complacency and delight in them. In many other passages also the term "elect" seems to be used as expressive of the peculiar interest which God takes in all that relates to his believing people: "Who will lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" "Shall not God avenge his own elect?" "For the elect's sake those days (of trouble to Jerusalem) shall be shortened." And, "God will send his angels (at the last day) to gather together his elect."]

But, notwithstanding their dearness to God, we have but too much reason to consider,

II. The straits to which they may be reduced—

It is evidently implied, that as the Israelites in their journey from Egypt must have perished for want of water, if God had not miraculously interposed for their relief; so all his people coming through the wilderness of this world, are at times reduced to difficulties, from whence none but God himself can deliver them. This happens to them by means of,

1. Afflictions—

[The people of God are, for the most part, "a poor and afflicted people." That they have peculiar supports and consolations, we shall soon shew: but inasmuch as they have all

^c 1 Sam. ii. 27, 28.

^e Acts ix. 15. Gal. i. 15, 16.

^g Matt. xx. 23.

^d Ps. lxxviii. 70, 71.

^f 2 Thess. ii. 13.

^h Isai. xlii. 1.

the common feelings of humanity, they must find afflictions grievous to them, exactly as others do. Even the most eminent saints have at times been ready to sink under their burthens. Behold David on the death of his rebellious son, Absalom; how bitterly he bewailed his lossⁱ! See Hezekiah under the pressure of what he supposed to be an incurable disease; how "he mourned like a dove, and his eyes failed with looking upward^k!" Thus it is with many under the loss of dear relatives, or the pressure of embarrassed circumstances, or the agonies of an acute disorder: they are ready to faint under their trials, and to be "weary even of life itself^l."]

2. Persecutions—

[Fitly is persecution compared to the scorching heat of the meridian sun. We are told what fatal effects it produces on those who have no root of grace in themselves^m; and the most steadfast Christians are exhorted to "consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest they should be weary and faint in their mindsⁿ." Even the Apostle Paul himself was sometimes "cast down^o," and needed peculiar supports from heaven^p. And though we are not now exposed to all those cruelties which the first Christians endured, yet there are many and heavy trials to be borne by "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus:" and he must be a faithful labourer, who supports without fainting "the burthen and heat of the day."]

3. Temptations—

[It is not without reason that the weapons with which Satan assaults the believer are represented as "fiery darts;" for when injected into the soul, they set the whole man, as it were, on fire, and "the poison of them altogether drinks up our spirits^q." Who has ever known what it is to be haunted with atheistical and blasphemous thoughts; or what, to be harassed with doubts about the truth of Christianity; or what, to be tormented with apprehensions of having committed the sin against the Holy Ghost: who that has ever felt the almost irresistible impulses of corruption, aided by the dreadful workings of despair; who, in short, is in any respect acquainted with the wiles of Satan, and the depths of his own depravity; and has not been constrained to cry, "Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me!"?]

ⁱ 2 Sam. xviii. 33.

^k Isai. xxxviii. 10—14.

^l See Ps. cvii. 5, 10, 18, 26, 27. and xxxviii. 1—8. and xlii. 7. and Job x. 1.

^m Matt. xiii. 6, 21.

ⁿ Heb. xii. 3.

^o 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9.

^p Acts xviii. 9, 10. See also Ps. cxliii. 3—8.

^q Job vi. 4.

But these troubles shall only bring them to the enjoyment of,

III. The mercies reserved for them—

As once God made the rivers and the sea to become dry land, so will he open rivers in the dry and thirsty wilderness. He will supply the wants of his drooping and dejected people : he has treasured up for them an inexhaustible fund of consolation,

1. In the promises of his Gospel—

[What “wells of salvation” are opened in the holy Scriptures! and with what unspeakable joy do thirsting souls “draw water out of them!” A believing application of one single promise to the soul is more reviving, even in the most disconsolate state, than any cup of water can possibly be to one perishing with thirst. Let, for instance, that consoling declaration which was made to Paul, when he complained so bitterly of the thorn in his flesh, and of the buffetings of Satan ; let that promise, I say, come home in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, and the very same effects will instantly follow ; our tears will be wiped away, and all our complaints be changed into triumphant exultations^r.]

2. In the communications of his grace—

[It is principally with a view to increase and strengthen their graces, that God permits his people to experience so many troubles. He “chooses them in the furnace of affliction,” and by means of the fire he “purges away their dross,” that they may come forth as gold. Blessed is the testimony which David bears to this truth^s: and every believer will esteem his trials most richly recompensed, when he finds that “they have wrought in him an increase of patience, experience, and hope^t.”]

3. In the manifestations of his love—

[Never does God vouchsafe such visits to his people, as when they are suffering for his sake, and in obedience to his will. “He will draw nigh unto them,” and “manifest himself unto them as he does not unto the world,” and will give them “the witness of the Spirit, as an earnest of their everlasting inheritance.” Thus, if their “afflictions abound *for* Christ, their consolations are made to abound *by* Christ^u.” Now “in the Lord’s favour is life ; and his loving-kindness is better than

^r 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10. See this further promised, Hos. ii. 14, 15. and exemplified, Ps. xxxii. 2—7.

^s Ps. cxxxviii. 3.

^t Rom. v. 3, 4.

^u 2 Cor. i. 5.

life :” when therefore a sense of his “love is shed abroad in the heart,” it little concerns them by what means so great a blessing has been imparted : whatever they may have endured to prepare them for it, they will not hesitate to say, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted.”]

APPLICATION—

[Is there any afflicted soul that cannot find consolation in God? He is only like Hagar, who had a fountain close to her, while she was expecting nothing but death^x: “let him therefore, though in darkness, stay himself upon his God^y.” Sooner or later, shall all who wait on God be refreshed and comforted^z.]

^x Gen. xxi. 15—19.

^y Isai. l. 10.

^z Isai. xl. 27—31. and xli. 17, 18. and xliv. 3. and xlix. 10.

DCCCCXXXIV.

THE GREATNESS OF GOD’S MERCY.

Isai. xliii. 22—26. *Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt-offerings; neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense. Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified.*

THE sinfulness of man, and the goodness of God, are subjects which mutually illustrate each other: neither can be viewed in its true colours, unless it be considered in its relation to the other: but both appear in perfection, when they are brought into immediate contrast together. This is the view in which they are frequently presented to us in the holy Scriptures, and especially in the passage now before us; in which we have,

I. A contrasted view of God’s conduct towards us, and of ours towards him—

God has not required any oppressive services of us—

[God, as the author of our being, has a right to all our time, and all our faculties: but he requires of us only one day in seven, to be spent in his more immediate service. The law, which he imposed upon the Jews, appeared indeed burthensome, through the infirmity of their flesh; though, when considered in its true light, it ought not to have appeared so^a. As for us, we are wholly freed from that yoke, and have only two easy and significant rites to observe. Nor is the moral law burthensome; for the whole substance of it is, Be holy, and be happy^b: and if a permission were given us to violate any one of its commands, it would be, in fact, a dispensation to make ourselves miserable.]

But we have been backward to offer him any token of respect and love—

[The Jews grudged to purchase a little calamus for the holy perfume and incense^c. Nor, if they brought any sacrifices, would they present the fat and good of their flocks, but rather, such as were lean and refuse^d. Thus have we been averse to “call upon him,” being soon “weary” of that holy employment — — — or, if we have just waited upon God in his outward ordinances, we have withheld from him that which alone could render our services pleasing in his sight, the tribute of an humble, contrite, and grateful heart. To mortify our lusts, and exercise devout and heavenly affections, would have cost us more pain and labour than we have been willing to afford: we have therefore wholly declined such services, and contented ourselves with offering only the cheap sacrifices of external and occasional formalities.]

Yea, instead of serving him aright, we have even “wearied him with our iniquities”—

[How awful the charge, which God himself here brings against us! He, who might justly demand any thing of us, has not required of us any great services, or wearied us with an intolerable yoke: but we, who are bound by every tie to please and honour him to the uttermost, have quite oppressed and wearied him by our long continued iniquities, till he is even “pressed under us, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves^e.” There is scarcely an evil desire, which we have not harboured and indulged. Pride, envy, malice, revenge,

^a It was necessary, in order to keep them separate from the heathen: it was the means of directing their attention to the Messiah, and of preparing them for the fuller light and liberty of the Gospel: it was also the means of their maintaining communion with the Deity, and of obtaining his richest blessings.

^b Rom. vii. 12.

^c Exod. xxx. 23, 25, 34, 35.

^d Mal. i. 8.

^e Amos ii. 13.

covetousness, impurity, and whatever else is hateful unto God, have at all times found a ready admission into our hearts: and if an outward restraint has been imposed upon our actions, it has not proceeded from a fear of God^f, or a hatred of sin, but from a regard to our characters among men, and to the temporal consequences which we dreaded. When we have known that our dispositions were offensive to God, we have not regarded him, any more than if he had been our slave, that was constrained to bear whatever we might impose upon him: we have altogether contemned him^g as unworthy of our notice, and lived as though there were no such Being in the universe.]

Marvellous as this contrast is, we shall be yet more astonished, while we consider,

II. God's address to us, founded upon the foregoing representation—

The former part of God's address is a free and gracious promise of forgiveness—

[What might such rebels have expected, but to hear God say, “Ah! I will ease me of mine enemies^h,” “I swear in my wrath, that they shall never enter into my restⁱ,” “my fury shall rest upon them, and I will be comforted^k.” But, behold, how different is his voice! ‘I, even I, whom you have so insulted, degraded, wearied; I, who could in an instant cast you into hell, as I did the rebel angels; I, who might be glorified in your eternal condemnation; even I, am ready to blot out all your transgressions, as a morning cloud: yea, I will blot them out through the blood of my dear Son; and, though I might well “seal them up in a bag,” and bring them forth at a future day to your everlasting confusion, I will no more remember them; they shall be perfectly blotted out, even as if they had never been committed. I well know, that if I seek for any thing in you to justify such an act of mercy, I shall never find it: there is nothing in you but what calls for wrath and fiery indignation: yet I will not on this account forbear to exercise mercy; I will pardon thee for *mine own sake*, that I may be glorified in displaying the exceeding riches of my grace.’

How infinitely does this surpass our highest conceptions! and how obdurate must be the heart that can withstand these overtures of love and mercy!]

The latter part of the address is an urgent invitation to accept of mercy—

[It may possibly be understood as a rebuke to a proud self-justifying Pharisee. Many, instead of humbling themselves

^f Rom. iii. 18.

^g Ps. x. 4, 13.

^h Isai. i. 24.

ⁱ Ps. xciv. 10, 11.

^k Ezek. v. 13.

under the charge brought against them, will instantly reply, "Wherein have we wearied thee¹?" To such God may be considered as saying, 'Since you plead your innocence^m, and stand on your own defence, as though you did not need this offer of mercy, come, and "put me in remembrance" of your good deeds (for, if you have any to boast of, they have quite escaped my notice): Let us plead together, and see whether I am right in my charge, or you in your vindication of yourself: declare thou the grounds of thy dependence, that, if they will bear thee out in thy confidence, "thou mayest be justified" before me.'

Alas! alas! that the offers of a free salvation should ever be despised through a vain confidence in our own goodness! O that we might not so despise our own mercies! Whatever sentence God shall pass upon us, "he will surely be justified in his saying, and be clear when he is judgedⁿ." Let us not then provoke God to such a contest; for our hope will be only as a spider's web, that shall be swept away with the besom of destruction^o.

But I understand it rather as a direction and encouragement to the repenting sinner. While some put away from them the word of life, because they feel not their need of mercy, others do the same, from an apprehension of their unworthiness to obtain mercy. But God is ever solicitous to encourage the humble, and says, "Put me in remembrance of this promise; come and plead it with me! declare thou thine affiance in it; and, unworthy as thou art, thou shalt be justified." As our Lord vouchsafed to Thomas the evidence of his senses, in order that his doubts might be effectually removed, so he here condescends to the infirmities of his people, in order to bring them to a full conviction of his love and faithfulness. Let this direction then be followed by every doubting, trembling soul. Let us take the Canaanitish woman for our pattern^p: and our confidence shall ere long be crowned with a rich reward^q.]

REFLECTIONS—

1. How averse is God to the perishing of an immortal soul!

[What stronger comment can we have on that oath of Jehovah, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" *Contemplate the text in that view*, and say whether God does not desire that all

¹ Mal. ii. 17.

^m Jer. ii. 35.

ⁿ Ps. li. 4.

^o Isai. xxviii. 17.

^p Matt. xv. 26, 27.

^q Heb. x. 35.

^r Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth^s?" Verily "He delighteth in mercy;" and "judgment," on whomsoever it is exercised, "is his strange work," to which he is utterly averse.]

2. How bitter will be the reflections of all who perish in their sins!

[If there be one ingredient in the cup of a damned soul more bitter than another, it is this; "My God and Saviour would have saved me, but I would not accept of his salvation^t. I would not come to him that I might have life^u. I pray you, beloved, treasure not up for yourselves such bitterness as this: but improve the present opportunity of obtaining mercy, for the day of grace once lost, is lost for ever. This, Brethren, is the accepted time: the Lord grant that it may prove unto every one of you the day of salvation^x."

^s 1 Tim. ii. 4.

^t Matt. xxiii. 37.

^u John v. 40.

^x 2 Cor. vi. 2.

DCCCCXXXV.

THE OUT-POURING OF THE SPIRIT PROMISED.

Isai. xlv. 1—5. *Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus saith the Lord that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses. One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.*

THERE is a striking analogy between the things which take place in the natural and in the moral world. As, in addition to the genial warmth of the sun, the showers are necessary to promote the progress of vegetation, so, in addition to the rising of the Sun of Righteousness upon us, the influences of the Holy Spirit are necessary, to soften our hearts, to water the seed that has been sown in them, and to produce in us those "fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God." In this the office of the Holy Spirit consists. By his

gracious operations on the soul, he applies to men that redemption which Jesus Christ has obtained for them; and by his sanctifying power he makes them meet for that inheritance which their Redeemer purchased for them by his blood. Whenever therefore we behold in the Scriptures a promise of the Holy Spirit, we should treasure it up in our minds, and seek not only to understand its import, but also to experience the accomplishment of it in our souls.

In discoursing on the words which we have just read, we shall consider,

I. The glorious promise here given us—

The manner in which the promise is introduced, is particularly deserving of our attention—

[In the last verse of the preceding chapter, the state of Israel is represented as altogether desperate: they were “given up by God to the curse and to reproaches.” Nevertheless God would not have any of them to despair; for, if they had but a desire to obtain mercy, he had mercy in reserve for them. He still regarded them as his “servants,” whom he had “chosen and formed” for his peculiar people, whom he had helped hitherto, and was still ready to “help” on every occasion that should arise: he calls them by the endearing names of “Jacob, and Israel, and Jesurun;” and bids them to dismiss their fears, and to expect from him all that their hearts could desire.

And is it not in the same way that he addresses *us*? Yes: notwithstanding all the judgments he has denounced against us for our sins, he says, “*Yet* hear now this, O Jacob my servant;” ‘remember thy relation to me; consider how free and rich has been my grace towards thee, in that I have “formed thee from the womb,” and “chosen thee” from all eternity, to be my most favoured servant: put away thy fears: entertain worthy thoughts of thy best Friend: limit not my tender mercies: enlarge thine expectations to the utmost extent of thy necessities; and thou shalt never be disappointed of thy hope.’

It is of great importance to notice the tender and affectionate manner in which God addresses his people; because it is from thence that we collect the most just conceptions of his condescension and grace, and derive the richest encouragement to wait upon him. It is also of great importance to observe what use God makes of the doctrine of election. Twice does he call them his “chosen;” because in that term is contained every thing that is endearing and encouraging. Only let us reflect on the state we were in when he chose us, and we shall see

that there is nothing too great for us to expect at the hands of such a gracious God^a.]

But the promise itself is most glorious—

[The gift of the Holy Ghost is that peculiar blessing which the Church in all ages was taught to look for under the Christian dispensation. A measure indeed of the Spirit was vouchsafed to the godly at all times; but the fuller effusion was reserved for the times of the Apostles; as it is said, “The Spirit was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified^b.” If we go back as far as to the days of Abraham, we shall find, that the promise of the Spirit was made to him, not so much for his descendants after the flesh, as for his spiritual progeny among the Gentiles, to whom it was fulfilled in the Apostles’ days^c. And the prophets taught the Jews, in every successive period, to look forward to the same time for the full enjoyment of this privilege. The prophet Joel in particular spoke strongly on this subject: and St. Peter refers to his words, as accomplished on the day of Pentecost^d. Our blessed Lord also, both before and after his resurrection, instructed his disciples to expect a more abundant measure of the Spirit than had ever yet been vouchsafed to the world: and to that very instruction of his did St. Peter refer, when the Spirit was first poured out upon the Gentiles^e. The *measure* in which this blessing was to be imparted to the Church, is also particularly marked in the words of our text: “I will *pour* (not merely *sprinkle*, but *pour*) water upon him that is thirsty, and *floods* upon the dry ground;” even such abundance, as shall be sure to reach the roots, and produce, not a transient change, like that of grass upon the house-top, but a radical and permanent change, both of heart and life.

That we may estimate the change aright, we have it exhibited in two striking images; that of grass, growing up after a season of extreme drought; and that of willows, watered by perennial streams. Here are images familiar to every eye, and calculated to convey a just idea of the effects universally produced by the operations of the Spirit of God upon the soul. A new principle of life begins to shew itself; and a new beauty and excellency to adorn the whole character: the appropriate fruits of every season, and of every condition, are brought forth, and the whole soul appears “as a well-watered garden.” *Partial changes* may be produced by *natural means*: but the *supernatural* operation of the Spirit invariably causes a *total* surrender of the soul to

^a Ezek. xvi. 3—6.

^b John vii. 39.

^c Gal. iii. 14.

^d Compare Joel. ii. 28, 29. with Acts ii. 1—4, 16—18.

^e Compare Matt. iii. 11. and Luke xxiv. 49. and Acts i. 4, 5. with Acts xi. 15, 16.

God. The unconverted man in his best estate conceives himself to have some right over himself: but the true convert says, yea, and delights to say, "I am the Lord's:" "I am his rightfully; I am his willingly and deliberately; I am his unreservedly and for ever." It is for this very end that the Spirit is promised; and these are its effects, wherever that promise is fulfilled.]

Now then let all the house of Israel hear,

II. The duties and privileges resulting from it—

Every promise brings with it correspondent duties as well as privileges: and most assuredly this promise is replete with INSTRUCTION and CONSOLATION,

1. To the Church at large—

[Think of Israel when under "the curse" of God, and overwhelmed by the "reproaches" of their enemies: What comfort must the words of our text have administered to them, especially to all who believed the prophet's testimony respecting them! And shall it afford less comfort to us at this time? Certainly this is a season of lamentable drought, when compared with the apostolic age. Though God does not leave us altogether without witness, yet the effect of our ministrations is very small and partial. But we look forward to a period, yea, and we hope that the clouds are even now gathering, when the Spirit shall be poured out again, and "showers of blessings" descend upon our thirsty land^f. We look for the time, when the Church, which is now but as a slender plant, shall become a tree, in whose branches the "fowl of every wing shall lodge^g." Then shall converts be "as the morning dew;" they shall fly in immense multitudes "as a cloud," and with the speed and velocity of "doves to their windows^h." The Church itself will be perfectly astonished at the vast increase of her membersⁱ; for "a nation shall be born in a day:" the most dreary regions of the earth shall, equally with ourselves, participate the blessing; and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." O what joy should such glorious prospects afford us! Did Abraham rejoice when he obtained but a glimmering view of the day of Christ; and shall not we, who have already seen him risen on our horizon, and behold him now rapidly advancing to his meridian height? Was the birth of Jesus announced by angels as "glad tidings of great joy to all people;" and shall not his universal reign, now speedily approaching, be hailed with joy? Yes; blessed be God! we not only "see the cloud of the bigness of a man's hand," but we behold the commencement of those showers, which shall refresh and fertilize the whole earth.]

2. To the weak and disconsolate in particular—

^f Ezek. xxxiv. 26.

^g Ezek. xvii. 23. Mark iv. 31, 32.

^h Ps. cx. 3. Isai. lx. 8.

ⁱ Isai. xlix. 18—21.

[What mercy can be in reserve for me, may one say, who am “given over to the curse of God, and to the reproaches” of my own conscience? Were I like “the earth that drinketh in the rain, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, I might hope for a blessing from God: but bearing, as I do, only briers and thorns, I am rejected, and nigh unto cursing; and my end is to be burned^k.” But what room is there for such desponding apprehensions, when we contemplate the state of Israel as described in the preceding chapter¹, and in the very words of our text? The “thirsty and the dry ground” is that to which the promise is made: and who may not find his character designated by those terms? But if these be not sufficiently humiliating, to warrant our hope of an interest in the promise, let us reflect on the description of persons for whom our blessed Saviour, on his ascension to heaven, received the gift of the Holy Ghost: it was “for *the rebellious*, that the Lord God might dwell among *them*^m.” Surely the most self-condemning person in the universe may venture to place himself in that class, and consequently to expect under that character what he could not venture to hope for as promised to *the righteous*. And, if a very extraordinary measure of grace be thought necessary for *us*, more than for others, we may surely find a sufficiency in the “*floods*” which are contained in the promise before us. Fear not then, whoever thou art; for God has said, that the poorest, even in the most destitute and desponding state, shall, on looking to the Saviour, have floods and fountains of grace, unbounded in their measure, irresistible in their efficacy, and endless in their durationⁿ.]

3. To parents more especially—

[The covenant made with Abraham, was made with him and with his seed^o; and this very promise, which holds forth to us the chief blessing of that covenant, is expressly said to be “unto us, and to our children, and to as many as are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call^p.” Let not any then be satisfied with having it fulfilled to themselves alone: let all consider the interest which their children also have in it; let them plead it with God in behalf of their offspring: and let them remember, that, whatever measure of grace they themselves possess, it is given them, not for their own good only, but “for the good of their children after them^q.” O Parents, bear in mind, that the gift of the Spirit is more to be desired in behalf of your children than thousands of silver and gold: let it be your daily prayer, that they may be endued with this precious gift: and, whilst you look for their growth

^k Heb. vi. 7, 8.

¹ Isai. xliii. 28.

^m Ps. lxviii. 18.

ⁿ Isai. xli. 17, 18.

^o Gen. xvii. 7—9. with Isai. lix. 21.

^p Acts ii. 38, 39.

^q Jer. xxxii. 39.

in bodily stature and intellectual attainments, look to see them "growing up as willows by the water-courses," and manifesting to all around them, how richly they are watered by the grace of God. That there is a great neglect of these things amongst religious professors, is but too true; but if the grace of God really exist in us, it will shew itself by an unwearied solicitude for the welfare of our offspring; as the prophet clearly intimates, when he says of the converts in the latter day, "They shall bring their sons in their arms, and their daughters (in litters) upon their shoulders." O that every mother might be as Hannah, and every father as Abraham^s! and that none of you would "give rest unto your God^t," till you have prevailed, like wrestling "Jacob^u," and constrained him, as it were, to "shed forth his Holy Spirit abundantly upon your offspring through Jesus Christ our Saviour^x!"

4. To young people, above all—

[Of whom is it said, that they shall, with such zeal and unanimity, devote themselves to God, and glory in the appellation of his people? Is it not of the young, who are springing up as willows by the water-courses? See then what is the first duty, and the highest privilege of the young! and see what all young people will do, as soon as they have "received the grace of God in truth!" And are there none amongst you who feel your obligations to God for the gift of his only dear Son to die for you? are there none so penetrated with his redeeming love, as to say in the fulness of your hearts, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" Come then to the table of the Lord, and surrender up yourselves to him there! Think it not too early to wait upon him in that ordinance: if you truly desire to be the Lord's, that is the ordinance at which in a more especial manner the surrender of yourselves to him should be made; and in that ordinance you may confidently expect that the Lord will more especially accept and bless you. In that ordinance too you form a closer union with the people of the Lord, who will delight to see you added to their society, and to help you forward by their counsels and their prayers. Come then, and "subscribe with your hand unto the Lord;" or rather, as soldiers, and slaves, and idolaters were used to *inscribe* on their flesh, in some indelible characters, the name of the general, or the master, or the idol, whom they served, so do you get inscribed on your heart, and on your arm, the name of your adorable Saviour, and give yourselves up to him in "a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten^y."]

^r Isai. xlix. 22.

^s 1 Sam. i. 22—28. Gen. xviii. 19.

^t Isai. lxii. 7.

^u Hos. xii. 4.

^x Tit. iii. 5, 6.

^y Jer. l. 4, 5. 2 Cor. viii. 5.

DCCCCXXXVI.

THE FOLLY OF SPIRITUAL IDOLATRY.

Isai. xliv. 20. *He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?*

WE who have lived under the light of revelation, and have been instructed in the knowledge of the one true God, are amazed at the stupidity of the Heathen, who form idols of wood and stone, and worship gods which they themselves have made. But we do not consider, that it is not the *forming* of these images, but the *trusting in* them, that makes them gods: and that we ourselves are guilty of idolatry as much as the heathen themselves, if in any respect we “love and serve the creature more than the Creator^a.” *This* is the essence of idolatry; as the Apostle tells us; “Beware of covetousness, which is idolatry^b.” And of persons addicted to sensual enjoyments, he says, they “make a god of their belly^c,” and Christians universally, being in danger of indulging an undue confidence in, or attachment to, the creature, are guarded against those evils in these very expressive terms, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols^d.” In speaking therefore of idolaters, it is not necessary that we carry you back to the prophet’s days, or that we take you amongst Pagans of the present day: the language in our text is quite as applicable to us at this time as to any of them. With a view therefore to spiritual idolaters amongst ourselves, I will shew you,
I. The folly of their ways—

Of every one amongst them it may truly be said, “He feedeth on ashes:” for, whatever the things be with which he seeks to satisfy his desires, they are,

1. Unsuitable—

[It is needless to say, how unsuitable ashes are for the food of the body: but they are not a whit less so than the things of this world are for the nourishment of the soul. The soul is a spiritual substance, and must be fed with that which

^a Rom. i. 25 ^b Col. iii. 5. ^c Phil. iii. 19. ^d John v. 21.

is spiritual. It was formed for God: and nothing but what comes from God, and leads to God, can support it. The word of God, for instance, is food on which it may subsist: and hence "the new-born babe desires the unadulterated milk of the word, that he may grow thereby^e." On this the saints of old subsisted: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them: and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart^f." The presence of God also is that which strengthens the believing soul: "for that it hungers and thirsts, even to see his power and glory, as they are revealed in the sanctuary: and, when a sense of his loving-kindness is imparted to it, the soul is filled as with marrow and fatness, and praiseth him with joyful lips^g." In a more particular manner the Christian is nourished by the flesh of Christ and the blood of Christ; on which he feeds continually, and which he finds to "be meat indeed, and drink indeed^h." As for the things of time and sense, they are but as husks which the swine eat of: and to attempt to feed on them, is only to "feed upon the windⁱ," and to "fill the belly with the east wind^k."

2. Unsatisfying—

[To all who go to the creature for happiness, the prophet says, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness^l." In confirmation of the reproof here given, I will venture to appeal to all, even to those who have drunk deepest of the cup of pleasure, and feasted themselves most largely with carnal delights; 'Has any thing that you have ever enjoyed, afforded you permanent satisfaction?' "Was your eye ever satisfied with seeing, or your ear with hearing?" or, "Was any man that loved silver, ever satisfied with silver^m?" There is but one testimony on this head, from every child of man. Vanity is written upon all human enjoyments; and vexation invariably follows in the pursuit of them.]

3. Injurious—

[As ashes, if taken into the stomach, would soon injure the constitution of the body, so all endeavours to satisfy the soul with carnal enjoyments will of necessity deprave and vitiate all its faculties. Such food will indispose the soul for every thing that is spiritual and divine: it will weaken all its energies; and debase all its powers; and reduce it to the lowest possible state of degradation, causing it to nauseate every thing which God has ordained for its good, and to affect every thing

^e 1 Pet. ii. 2.

^g Ps. lxxiii. 1—5.

^k Job xv. 2.

^f Jer. xv. 16. Ps. cxix. 103.

^h John vi. 53—55.

^l Isai. lv. 1, 2.

ⁱ Hos. xii. 1.

^m Eccl. v. 10.

which will tend to its destruction. Every day that a man lives to himself and to this present world, he departs farther and farther from God, and renders himself more and more incapable of heavenly pursuits and heavenly enjoyments. He is “a sinner against his own soulⁿ,” and is fitly represented as “wronging his own soul, and loving death^o.”]

But to what shall we look as,

II. The source of their errors—

It is not from any radical defect in their understanding that this idolatry proceeds: it comes from their *heart*: “a deceived heart hath turned them aside.” This is a point which is by no means duly considered. If the subject of idolatry be brought fairly before a heathen, he sees at once that his god cannot help itself, and consequently can much less afford any help to him. And in like manner the spiritual idolater, if only he will candidly examine the matter, must see, and be convinced, that a vain world can never satisfy an immortal soul. But,

1. His heart is deceived by Satan—

[Satan is the great deceiver of mankind. He puts a gloss on every thing; representing as desirable that which is in itself evil; and hiding the deformity of it; and assuring us, that no painful consequences will follow a compliance with his suggestions. Thus he beguiled Eve in Paradise: and thus he still deceives the children of men, over the face of the whole earth. “He was a lying spirit in all the prophets of Ahab^p,” and he has his agents in every place, who are ready by every possible means to forward his delusions. He can, and often does, “assume the form of an angel of light^q,” and not unfrequently urges his temptations in so specious a way, as “to deceive, if it were possible, the very elect^r.” In a word, so subtle are his devices, that to know them, and be aware of them, is a science which scarcely any human being is able to attain^s; so innumerable are his wiles, and so unsearchable his deceptions.]

2. His deceived heart turns aside his whole man—

[The heart, beguiled thus, and vitiated with evil propensities, blinds his understanding, biasses his will, and carries him forward in ways, which a more dispassionate view of things would lead him to condemn. This distinction clearly appears in the two verses preceding our text: “They have not known

ⁿ Numb. xvi. 38.

^o Prov. viii. 35, 36.

^p 1 Kings xxii. 22.

^q 2 Cor. xi. 13—15.

^r Matt. xxiv. 24.

^s 2 Cor. ii. 11.

nor understood: for God hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see, and their hearts, that they cannot understand. And *none considereth in his heart*, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire, &c. and shall I make the remains thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? Then it is added, “He feedeth on ashes; *a deceived heart hath turned him aside.*” The blindness in his understanding arises from a want of due and unbiassed consideration in the heart. And, in fact, all evil will be found to originate here. “The heart of the sons of men is full of evil^t,” and it is “deceitful above all things, as well as desperately wicked^u,” and, like a bias in a bowl, even when under any strong impulse a man has been going for a season in a right direction, it draws him gradually aside, and causes him to rest in a situation far distant from that at which he aimed. Who amongst us has not had abundant experience of this in his own soul? Who amongst us has not been drawn from complying with the dictates of a better principle, by the more powerful influence of an evil principle within him; and thus followed the less proper course, at the very time that he beheld and approved the better^x? Thus it is with all the votaries of this world: they have an internal consciousness that their ways and their doings are not good: they therefore will not bring them to the test of God’s revealed will: “they are afraid of coming to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov’d^y,” yet, through the deceits of Satan and their own hearts, they say, “We shall have peace, notwithstanding we walk in the imagination of our own hearts^z,” Thus, I say, it is with them: they are “carried away by *a spirit of whoredom*^a,” “they are drawn away of their own lust, and enticed. Then, when their lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death^b.”]

Hence we may easily account for,

III. The strength of their delusions—

“They cannot deliver their souls”—

[Truly, as our Liturgy well expresses it, they “are tied and bound with the chain of their sins.” The whole generation of ungodly men are “led captive by the devil, at his will^c,” and are “carried away to their idols, even as they are led^d.” Amongst them all there are few, if any, who have not felt at times some desire to liberate themselves from their thralldom, and formed some purpose to turn unto their God. But they

^t Eccles. ix. 3.

^y John iii. 19, 20.

^b Jam. i. 14, 15.

^u Jer. xvii. 9.

^z Deut. xxix. 19.

^c 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^x Rom. vii. 23.

^a Hos. iv. 12.

^d 1 Cor. xii. 2.

have not been able to effect it; their inward lusts have been too strong for them, and their deep-rooted habits too inveterate; so that "they could no more change their course of life, than an Ethiopian could change his skin, or a leopard his spots^e." Their good desires have perhaps been renewed from time to time; but have soon vanished again; "their goodness being only as a morning cloud, or as the early dew that passeth away^f." In a time of sickness possibly, and at the expected approach of death, they may appear to have gained the victory over their corruptions. But no resolutions of theirs have been found sufficient. Returning health has brought with it renewed temptations; and these have borne down all their purposes, which have snapped asunder, as the cords or withs with which Sampson was bound: and the poor devotees of this world have returned again to their idols, "as a dog to his vomit, and as a sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire."]

"They cannot even say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

[Even to consider their ways with any seriousness, is an effort beyond their power. I mean not that they are under any *natural* incapacity for this; but such is their *moral* weakness, and such the strength of their corrupt nature, that they *cannot* do what their better judgment would dictate. If they attempt to read or pray, their minds start aside from the employment, "even as a deceitful bow^g:" and their thoughts quickly rove to the very ends of the earth. It is said of Satan, that, "as a strong man armed, he keepeth his palace, and his goods are in peace^h." And this is verified in experience: for he keepeth his vassals from considering their bondage; he suggests to them that they will have some more convenient season for such unwelcome reflections; and he thus induces them to "think only of peace and safety, till sudden destruction come upon themⁱ," and they "perish without a remedy^k." One would indeed scarcely conceive it possible that rational and immortal beings should be so insensible in the midst of their dangers, and against all the dictates of their better judgment: but so it is: they are willingly deceived, and are therefore "given over to a delusion to believe their own lie^l:" and so "vain are they in their imaginations, and so darkened in their foolish hearts^m," that to bid them examine whether they have not a lie in their right hand, is as great an offence to them, as it would be to a poor, blind, infatuated heathen.]

^e Jer. xiii. 23. ^f Hos. vi. 4. ^g Ps. lxxviii. 57. Hos. vii. 16.

^h Luke xi. 21. ⁱ 1 Thess. v. 3. ^k Prov. xxix. 1.

^l 2 Thess. ii. 11. ^m Rom. i. 21.

INFER—

1. How thankful should we be for a Saviour!

[If God had not “laid help for us upon One that is mighty,” who amongst us could ever be saved? Blessed be God, if there is “a strong man armed that has enslaved us, there is a stronger than he, that has overcome him, and taken from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divided his spoilsⁿ,” and at this moment sends his servants to proclaim, in his name, “liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound^o.” The very first sermon which he himself ever preached on earth was to this effect^p. In his name therefore I now “preach the acceptable year of the Lord,” even the year of Jubilee, wherein every slave may assert his liberty, and claim the possession of his forfeited inheritance. Rejoice then, Brethren, in these glad tidings: and now “cast your idols to the moles and to the bats.” Feed no more on ashes: let not a deceived heart any longer turn you aside: but deliver your souls; and come forth into the light and liberty of the children of God. If your past idolatries have involved your souls in guilt, there is a sufficiency in the blood of Christ to cleanse you from it^q; if your corruptions appear so inveterate that you cannot hope to subdue them, “the grace of Christ shall be sufficient for you^r.” Only seek henceforth your all in him, and “you shall be saved by him with an everlasting salvation: you shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end^s.”]

2. How watchful should we be against the remains of our corrupt nature!

[Whilst we are in this world, we still carry about with us “a body of sin and death,” and many corrupt propensities, against which we must be ever on our guard. We are but “in part renewed.” “The flesh still lusteth against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh^t.” And Satan has still power to tempt us, yea, and “will sift us all as wheat,” if our blessed Lord do not interpose for our help. We see in Demas, how prone the carnal heart is to relapse into the love of earthly things; and we know very little of ourselves, if we have not learned, by our own manifold backslidings, that we are yet in danger of “turning back unto perdition^u,” and of “losing all the things which we have wrought^x.” I would say then, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation^y,” “and take to you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand^z” — —]

ⁿ Luke xi. 21, 22.^o Isai. xlix. 9.^p Luke iv. 18, 19.^q 1 John i. 7.^r 2 Cor. xii. 9.^s Isai. xlv. 17.^t Gal. v. 17.^u Heb. x. 38, 39.^x 2 John, ver. 8.^y Matt. xxvi. 41.^z Eph. vi. 12, 13.

DCCCCXXXVII.

THE WORK OF REDEMPTION A MOTIVE TO CONVERSION.

Isai. xlv. 22. *Return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.*

ON occasions of public worship we generally expect a *set* discourse from *man*. But on the present occasion, I wish you to place *man* altogether out of the question, and to listen to a few words addressed to you by *Jesus Christ himself*. It is he who is speaking in the passage before us, and who, addressing, as it were, every one of us by name, urges us by the most forcible of all considerations to return to him. True indeed the words in the first instance were delivered to the Jews, who, notwithstanding all that Jehovah, the only true God, had done for them, were prone to idolatry; and who were absurd enough to cut down a tree, and fashion it after the image of a man, and, after having roasted their food with a part of it, to worship the residue of it as a god. Yet, instead of denouncing his heaviest judgments against them, our Lord says, “O Jacob and Israel, thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.” Now though *we* are not gross idolaters as the Israelites were, we may very fitly consider the words of our text as addressed to ourselves, since every one of us has lived in *spiritual* idolatry, “loving and serving the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore.”

Let us then consider,

I. The invitation, “Return unto me.”

That we have all departed from God is evident from what the Prophet Isaiah says, “All we like sheep have gone astray, every one to his own way^a.” Thus though, as to the particular ways which we have pursued, we may differ, one having rushed into all manner of gross sins, whilst another has walked in a

^a Isai. liii. 6.

more moral and decent way, we are all alike in this, that we have lived to ourselves rather than unto God. This we all have acknowledged in the general Confession^b — — — and therefore we may all, without exception, consider the invitation as addressed to ourselves: “Return unto me;”

1. In penitence—

[As sinners, we are all called upon to repent: nor can we ever be accepted of God, whilst we continue impenitent. The Prodigal Son, in his return, is a pattern to us all^c — — — The Publican, and not the self-applauding Pharisee, was justified before God^d. It is not the more notorious sinner only that is to “sow in tears, in order to reap in joy:” for “he that covereth his sins, whoever he may be, shall not prosper: it is he only who confesseth and forsaketh them, that shall find mercy^e.” Hence the Saviour would have the very best of men approach him with that penitential acknowledgment, “Behold, I am vile: I repent and abhor myself in dust and ashes^f.”]

2. In faith—

[We are not to come to the Lord doubting either his power or his willingness to save us^g, but fully confiding in him as able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him^h: “If I may but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be wholeⁱ.” Our Saviour would not have any doubts entertained in our mind. He reproved Martha for questioning the fullest possible accomplishment of his word: “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God^k?” In our return to him he will make our faith the measure of the benefits he will confer upon us: “He says, according to your faith it shall be unto you^l.”]

3. In love—

[He must have willing servants, or none. We must account “none of his commandments grievous^m,” but regard “his yoke easy and his burthen lightⁿ.” In returning to him, the language of our hearts must be that which he himself used, when first he undertook our cause: “Lo, I come; I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart^o.” In fact, our readiness and determination of heart to obey his will is the only true test of our repentance, our faith, or our

^b Cite it.

^c Luke xv. 18, 19.

^d Luke xviii. 14.

^e Prov. xxviii. 13.

^f Job xlii. 6.

^g Mark ix. 22, 23. Matt. viii. 2.

^h Heb. vii. 25.

ⁱ Matt. ix. 21.

^k John xi. 40.

^l Matt. ix. 29.

^m 1 John v. 3.

ⁿ Matt. xi. 30.

^o Ps. xl. 7, 8.

love. With whatever measure of penitence or faith we may profess to return to him, "it will be in vain to cry, Lord! Lord! if we do not the things which he commands^p."

Whilst we listen to our Saviour's invitation, it will be well to consider,

II. The motive with which he enforces it.

He might well have enforced it with the most terrible denunciations of his wrath in the event of our refusal. But he rather reminds us of the great things he has done for us;

1. As a call upon our gratitude—

[Think what I have done for you, in leaving my Father's bosom, in assuming your fallen nature, in bearing your sins upon the cross, and in effecting your reconciliation with your offended God. Does all this love call for such a return at your hands; and "is it right for you to requite" it as you are now doing? Is it well for you to abide at a distance from me, and to "trample upon my blood as an unholy thing," and to "crucify me afresh by continuing in your sins^q?" Had I never shewn such mercy to you, your wickedness in departing from me would have been comparatively light: but "now you can have no cloak for your sin^r;" nay, you must stand utterly condemned in your own minds. But if you will duly contemplate the love which I have shewn to you, it will surely generate in your hearts somewhat of a corresponding love to me, and "constrain you to live unto him, who has so lived and died for you^s."]]

2. As an encouragement under our fears—

[In despite of all that the Lord Jesus has done and suffered for us, we are prone, under a deep conviction of our sins, to doubt whether he will receive such sinful creatures as we. But let us suppose, that, immediately after his resurrection, he had met many of his murderers, and told them, that the very blood which they had shed should cleanse them from the guilt of shedding it; could they have doubted his willingness to save their souls? Now it is in this very way that he meets us at this time. Our sins were the true cause of all his sufferings: and *in his word* he meets us at this very hour, and says to every one of us individually, "I have redeemed thee; O return to me; for I have redeemed THEE." Dismiss then your fears, whatever you may have been, or whatever you may have done: for his blood will cleanse from all sin^t," nor shall any soul perish that believes in him^u. Let the most unrighteous man in the

^p Luke vi. 46.

^q Heb. vi. 6. and x. 29.

^r John xv. 22.

^s 2 Cor. v. 14.

^t 1 John. i. 7.

^u John iii. 16.

universe only return to him in penitence and faith, "and He will have mercy upon him, and abundantly pardon all his multiplied transgressions^x."]]

APPLICATION—

[Let the *careless sinner* hear this. When you are in the midst of all your mirth and gaiety, call this to mind: 'My Saviour is here with me; and in a still small voice he says to me, Return unto me from whom thou hast deeply revolted; "return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." What has the world ever done for you, that it should be preferred to me? or what can it ever do, that shall compensate for the loss of my redeeming love?' Surely, my Brethren, one such thought as this will damp all your joys, and constrain you, like the Saviour's look on Peter, to go forth from your scenes of dissipation, and weep bitterly^y — — —

Let the *backsliding professor*, in particular, consider himself as here addressed. To *him* our Saviour says, 'What iniquity have you found in me, that you should so slight my love? Have I been a wilderness to you, and a land of darkness, that you should thus wickedly depart from me^z? O remember, "It were better for you never to have known me, than thus to reflect dishonour on my name^a." Think, in what your declension must issue, if you return not to me with your whole heart.' And now, ere it be too late, say, "What have I to do any more with idols?" "I will return unto my first Husband; for then it was better with me than now^b" — — — Then shall you pour forth those joyous strains which follow my text; and, with David and Peter, unite for ever in the loudest hosannas to your redeeming God.]

^x Isai. lv. 7, 8.

^y Matt. xxvi. 75.

^z Jer. ii. 5, 31.

^a 2 Pet. ii. 21.

^b Hos. ii. 7. and xiv. 8.

DCCCCXXXVIII.

REDEMPTION A GROUND OF JOY.

Isai. xlv. 23. *Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.*

IF the word of God produced its full effect upon the hearts of men, this world would be very much assimilated to heaven: there would be the same views, the same dispositions, the same exercises and employments amongst our fallen race, as are found amongst

the angels, in the presence of their God. Let us only conceive that the subjects in the text universally occupied the minds of men; and that they were celebrated by all ranks of people with the ardour and affection suited to their importance; surely we should have a very heaven upon earth! Permit me then to remind you, that,

I. "The Lord hath redeemed his people"—

The redemption of the Jews from Babylon was a great and joyful event. The person who was to effect it was foretold by name. The manner in which he should take the city of Babylon (by turning the course of the Euphrates, and passing through the gates of brass), and the use which he should make of his triumph (by liberating the captive Jews, and ordering them to rebuild their city and temple), was all distinctly specified, above two hundred years before such a person as Cyrus existed in the world^a. But, extraordinary as this event was, it was only a shadow of one infinitely more important,—the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. He has redeemed his people,

1. By price—

[In a figurative sense, God may be said to have "given Egypt and Ethiopia as the ransom of Israel^b." But what is the "ransom that he has found for us^c?" What is "the price with which he has bought us^d" out of the hands of sin and Satan? Kingdoms and worlds were insufficient for the purpose. We could not be "redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but only with the precious blood of God's co-equal Son^e." Great as the price was, God did not hesitate to lay it down: "he purchased the Church with his own blood^f." No longer can we now be detained in bondage, if we claim our liberty in the name of Christ. "The law cannot condemn us^g; Satan cannot lead us captive^h; "sin cannot have dominion over usⁱ." If we avail ourselves of "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," we shall be "delivered from every kind of bondage, and be brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God^k." "Being made free by Christ, we shall be free indeed^l."]

^a ver. 26—28. and ch. xlv. 1—4.

^b Isai. xliii. 3.

^c Job xxxiii. 24.

^d 1 Cor. vi. 20.

^e 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

^f Acts xx. 28.

^g Gal. iii. 13.

^h Luke xi. 22.

ⁱ Rom. vi. 14.

^k Rom. viii. 21.

^l John viii. 36.

2. By power—

[The deliverances vouchsafed to the Jews of old were effected by “a mighty hand, and a stretched-out arm.” And it is only “in the day of God’s power that any are made willing^m” to embrace the salvation offered them in Christ Jesus. The “report of the Gospel is believed by those only, to whom the arm of the Lord is revealedⁿ.” To rescue a soul from the tyranny of sin and Satan, is a work of omnipotence. Easy as it may seem to persuade a person to believe in Christ, it far surpasses the ability of any created being. “God himself must bring us to this self-same thing^o,” and we are told, that, in the accomplishment of this work, he exerts no less power than he did when he raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and set him at his own right hand, above all the principalities and powers, whether of heaven or hell^p. Redemption is prepared for us before we come into the world: but, in order to enjoy its benefits, we must, each in his own person, experience the mighty working of God’s power: He who “spoiled principalities and powers upon the cross,” must triumph over them in our hearts; and incline us, by the effectual operation of his Spirit, to embrace the salvation which he purchased with his blood.]

God has not only thus consulted our happiness, but,

II. Herein “he has also glorified himself”—

Every work of God’s hands bespeaks his wisdom, his power, and his goodness: but the work of redemption glorifies all his perfections. We might easily shew how his justice and his holiness are illustrated by it, and how they are made to harmonize with truth and mercy: but we shall content ourselves with shewing, that herein he has glorified,

1. His grace and mercy—

[Consider only the state in which we were, when God sent his only dear Son to redeem us; and the state in which

^m Ps. cx. 3.

ⁿ Isai. liii. 1.

^o 2 Cor. v. 5.

^p Eph. i. 19—21. The original in ver. 19. shews that the Apostle laboured to the utmost to express his ideas, which were too big for utterance. *Τίς ἡ δύναμις* might have sufficed: but to that he adds *μέγεθος*; and to that *ὑπερβάλλον*. Because all this was inadequate to convey his mind fully, he accumulates other terms; *κατὰ τὴν ἰσχύον* — *κατὰ τὸ κράτος τῆς ἰσχύος* — *κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν* κ. τ. λ. Having thus multiplied his terms to the uttermost, and pressed into his service the strongest word that the Greek language could afford him, he repeats it; *ἣν ἐνήργησεν*. What light does this cast upon the subject before us!

we are found, when he sends his Holy Spirit to apply that redemption to us: we were fallen after the example of the apostate angels; yet God passed by them, and delivered up his own Son for us: we are still "enemies to God in our minds by wicked works," and are actually fighting against God with all our might; and yet does he subdue us by "the rod of his strength," and make "his Gospel to be the power of God to the salvation of our souls." And must we not stand amazed at this difference which is put between us and the fallen angels? must we not adore that sovereignty which "chose us in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world^q," and in due season exalts us to thrones of glory; yea, which in many instances favours the vilest of publicans and harlots in preference to learned Scribes and self-applauding Pharisees^r: We are told indeed, that God designed by his Gospel to display "the exceeding riches of his grace^s:" and this end is thoroughly accomplished: for wherever the Gospel is received, it invariably magnifies his grace in the eyes of men: 'Why didst thou choose *me*, Lord? Why was I made to comply with thine invitations, while so many were suffered to decline them, and to perish in their sins?' Scarcely the gift of Christ himself will furnish matter for more admiration and gratitude in heaven than this: or rather, I should say, the greatness of the gift, and the sovereignty with which it is bestowed, will be interwoven with each other in everlasting hallelujahs.]

2. His truth and faithfulness—

[The redemption given us in Christ was a subject of prophecy, as well as that which was vouchsafed to the Jews through the instrumentality of Cyrus. And when Christ was sent into the world, the truth and faithfulness of God were most conspicuously displayed. Of these, the aged and inspired priest more particularly expressed his admiration; repeatedly blessing and praising God for "performing the promises made by the mouth of his holy Prophets, and remembering the oath which he had sworn to our father Abraham^t." Nor is the truth of God to be noticed only in sending us a Redeemer: it is equally visible in applying redemption to our souls. There is not one that ever partakes of this redemption, but in consequence of his having been "given to Christ" before the foundation of the world^u: nor is one brought finally to the complete enjoyment of it in heaven, but his continued preservation through all his perils and conflicts is an accomplishment of that promise, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee^x." Surely at the end of

^q Eph. i. 4.

^s Eph. i. 6, 7. and ii. 7.

^u John xvii. 6. 2 Tim. i. 9.

^r Matt. xxi. 31.

^t Luke i. 68, 70, 72, 73.

^x Heb. xiii. 5.

our journey we shall take the same review as Joshua did in his last moments; we shall adore the faithfulness of God and say, "Of all the good things which God hath promised me, not one thing hath failed^y."

Is the glory of God so blended with the happiness of man? Surely,

III. This is a ground of most exalted joy to the whole creation—

All, both in heaven and earth, are required to rejoice in it—

[Even the angels who never fell have reason to rejoice in this great event, because by means of it they have brighter discoveries of God's character, and more enlarged views of his perfections. Indeed they no sooner beheld its accomplishment in the incarnation of Christ, than they sang, "Glory to God in the highest!" and from the moment that Christ had completed his work, and was seated at the right hand of God, they commenced a new song, ascribing glory to the Lamb, as well as unto Him who sitteth upon the throne^z.

But it is to *men* more especially that the Gospel is "tidings of great joy^a." They are the persons more immediately interested in it; nor is there "a tree in the whole forest" of the universe, "from the cedar to the hyssop," that ought not to "break forth into singing, and shout for joy." Let those who are most elevated in rank and dignity consider, what source of joy the whole world affords them in comparison of this. Do they admire wisdom? "In this are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge^b." Do they find gratifications in wealth and honour? What can ever enrich or ennoble them like the Gospel of Christ, by which they become children of God, and heirs of his kingdom? Let the poor also, who merely vegetate, as it were, in obscurity, let them remember, that they are "plants of the Lord's planting^c," and that they are as much interested in redeeming love as any people upon earth. Methinks, the less they have of carnal joy, the more they should seek to rejoice in God. Indeed they are as much distinguished above the rich in respect of spiritual privileges, as the rich are above them in the vanities of this world^d. What God therefore has chosen for them, let them choose also for themselves.]

Moreover their joy should be proportioned to the occasion for it—

^y Josh. xxiii. 14.

^z Rev. v. 12, 13.

^a Luke ii. 10.

^b Col. ii. 3.

^c Isai. lxi. 3.

^d Jam. ii. 5.

[A cold or languid expression of gratitude would be utterly unsuited to the mercy vouchsafed unto us. It calls for all the powers of our souls; yea, "all that is within us should bless God's holy name^e." If we would form a just idea of the state in which we should be, let us imagine ourselves, not merely condemned, but already "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire:" How should we *then* hear the tidings of redemption? How would the fallen angels rejoice to see the gates of hell opened to them, and to have an offer of immediate restoration to the felicity of heaven! How would every one break forth into singing! What shouts of joy would echo through the vast expanse of hell! Precisely thus ought we to be affected with the deliverance that is proclaimed to us. We are told that when Titus Flaminius, the Roman general and proconsul, caused liberty to be proclaimed in the theatre to the States of Greece, the people with one consent rent the air with their acclamations, extolling him as their greatest benefactor, and crying, A saviour! a saviour! How much more reason have we to exalt our adorable Benefactor, who has "redeemed us to God by his blood, and made us kings and priests unto God and his Father^f!" Let us then sing, and shout for joy. Let the "*mercy and truth*" which God has manifested in this redemption, be the especial subjects of our praise^g. Thus shall we be prepared to join the heavenly choir, and to sing hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever.]

^e Ps. ciii. 1.

^f Rev. i. 5, 6. and v. 9.

^g Ps. xcvi. 3. This whole psalm is exactly suited to the occasion.

DCCCCXXXIX.

THE EFFICACY OF THE GOSPEL.

Isai. xlv. 8. *Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it.*

IT is generally thought, that doctrines relating to God's sovereignty, and to the divine decrees, are chiefly, if not exclusively, dwelt upon by the Apostle Paul. But, if any one read the Old Testament, he will find these doctrines advanced in almost every page. The chapter before us will furnish us with an instance quite in point. God had determined to deliver his people from their Babylonish captivity above two hundred years before they were carried

captive, or Babylon itself, as an empire, had any prominent existence in the world: he also named the person by whom it should be effected, almost three hundred years before he was born, and yet there had never been a king of that name; and even specified the means by which he should effect the conquest of Babylon, which was so fortified as to be, humanly speaking, impregnable^a: he declared, also, that that person, contrary to all reasonable expectation, should liberate them without fee or reward, and give orders for the rebuilding of their city and temple^b. Who does not see, in all this, Jehovah acting as a Sovereign, according to his own will and pleasure, and directing every thing for his own glory? The Persians, over whom this Cyrus was to reign, had an idea that there were two separate and independent powers, represented under the emblems of light and darkness, who were the authors, the one of all good, and the other of all evil. To these they would be ready to ascribe their failure or success. But God told them, beforehand; "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I, the Lord, do all these things:" and, consequently, they must give all the glory of their success to him. Then he issues his command to the heavens and the earth to concur with him in this great event, and to produce amongst his people those blissful scenes which he had destined them to enjoy.

In this view, the words before us are, not a prayer, but a prophetic annunciation of an event which should assuredly, in due season, be accomplished. And, in our further explanation of them, I will mark,

I. The import of this prophecy—

Its primary reference is to the restoration of the Jews to their own land—

[This is the subject treated of: and to this the words undoubtedly, in the first instance, refer. Certainly, by the decree of Cyrus, the Jewish people would be delivered from most cruel bondage: and, by their re-establishment in their

^a ver. 1—4.

^b ver. 13.

own land, they would, together with an abundance of temporal blessings, again enjoy the blessedness of waiting upon God in the instituted ordinances of his worship. And, inasmuch as this would tend to the advancement of their souls in righteousness and true holiness, it might justify the language by which it was expressed. To the same effect the Prophet Ezekiel speaks: "I will make them, and the places round about my hill, a blessing: and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase; and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them^c."

But it is evident that the prophecy includes in it a more important event; and that]

Its ulterior reference is to the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom—

[Under similar emblems is the Messiah's kingdom frequently described. It is chiefly characterized by the outpouring of the Spirit upon God's Church and people, and the consequent production of the fruits of righteousness among them in rich abundance. Remarkable is that declaration of the Prophet Joel: "It shall come to pass, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit^d." Of the true meaning of those words we can have no doubt; because they were cited by St. Peter on the day of Pentecost, as fulfilled, when he and the rest of the Apostles were enabled by the Spirit to address their audience in the different languages of all the nations to which they belonged^e. With a sanctifying efficacy also was this effusion of the Spirit accompanied, as Isaiah also had foretold: for "when the Spirit was to be poured out from on high, then was the wilderness to become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field to be counted for a forest^f." This, I say, was to characterize the Christian æra, as David also had foretold: "He shall come down like rain upon the grass, as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth^g."]

But my more particular object in this discourse is, to point out, not merely the sense of the prophecy, but also,

^c Ezek. xxxiv. 26, 27. ^d Joel. ii. 28, 29. ^e Acts ii. 16—18.

^f Isai. xxxii. 15.

^g Ps. lxxii. 6, 7.

II. The peculiar beauty of the image under which it is conveyed—

We are no strangers to the benefits arising from the showers which water the earth: and the correspondence between those and the benefits accruing from an outpouring of the Spirit of God is obvious and intelligible to all. You will remember, that our text is a command to the heavens and the earth to perform their respective offices for the renovation of the world. And I wish you particularly to notice,

1. Their mutual dependence, as here intimated—

[Every one knows, that in a season of drought the earth cannot send forth its fruits: it must be watered by the clouds, in order that free scope may be given for the exercise of its vegetative and fructifying powers. In like manner, the clouds, however liberally they may pour forth their stores upon the earth, can produce no fruits, unless they fall upon a fertile soil. On a sandy desert their gifts are wasted, altogether without effect.

I say not that the Spirit of God is equally dependent on the powers of man; for man has no power which he has not first received from God: but *in the ordinary course of God's dealings with mankind* there must be a *similar* exercise of powers on the part of man, to render effectual the gifts of God. However good the seed of the word may be, or however richly it may be watered by the Spirit of God, we see, by experience, that it springs not up when sown by the way-side; and that it then only produces fruit unto perfection, when it is sown in an honest and good heart^h. I need not say how barren the heart of man is, if not watered by divine grace. He knows little of himself, who does not feel that “without” constant communications from the Lord Jesus “Christ he can do nothingⁱ.” Yet, at the same time, we must take care to improve the blessings conferred upon us. We must plough up the fallow ground, and harrow in the seed that is cast upon it; and endeavour to take out, from time to time, the weeds which spring up within us, and which, if disregarded, would soon obstruct the growth of the better principles within us. In a word, we must “work out our salvation with fear and trembling, *notwithstanding* all fruitfulness proceeds from God; yea, and *because* it is God who giveth us both to will and do of his good pleasure^k.”]

2. Their united operation, as here described—

^h Luke viii. 15.

ⁱ John xv. 5.

^k Phil. ii. 12, 13.

["Behold the heavens dropping down fatness upon the earth, and the skies pouring down righteousness:" Behold, at the same time, "the earth opening" to receive the benefits, and "righteousness and salvation springing up together." Behold this, I say, in *the field of nature*; what a change is wrought, almost instantaneously on the face of the earth! Behold it, also, in *the field of grace*. Behold a *place* thus visited: how blessed the change that takes place in the ordinances of religion, in the habits of the people, and in the different institutions which immediately spring up for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world! Behold a *soul* thus highly favoured: formerly it had not a disposition or desire but towards the things of time and sense: God, and all the wonders of redeeming love were out of sight; and eternity had but a slender influence on its decisions. But now the thoughts go forth with devout affection towards heavenly objects: prayer and praise, which formerly were no more than a mere outward form, are the sweet, I had almost said the natural, exercises of the mind. To fulfil the will of God, and to promote his glory; to enjoy his presence and to taste his love; to grow up into his image, and be made meet for his inheritance; *these* are now the great ends for which the soul desires to live, and the constant object of its pursuit; and all its tempers, dispositions, and habits, are brought into accordance with these new desires. Let any one, looking back upon his former life, compare with it his state since he has received the grace of God; and he will find, that his soul is become, comparatively, "like a well-watered garden;" and that the fruits of righteousness, of which it once was destitute, are springing up continually, to the praise and glory of his God. The union of the two is inseparable: wherever fruitfulness is, there has previously been the grace of God: and wherever the grace of God descends into the soul, there will immediately spring up the fruits of righteousness, as indications and evidences of its power. "Truth will assuredly spring out of the earth, when righteousness looks down from heaven¹."]

3. The true source and origin of all their efficacy—

[In my text it is said, "I the Lord have created it." In the material world, all is of God, and of God alone. The whole universe combined could not make one shower, or give fertility to a sandy desert: nor can any power but God's effect the renovation of fallen man. Hence it is said of the regenerate soul, "We are *God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them*^m." Whatever be the means used by

¹ Ps. lxxxv. 11.

^m Eph. ii. 10. and iv. 24.

God, the work is his alone. "Paul may plant, and Apollos water; but it is God that gives the increaseⁿ." To him must every thing be traced, as much as the creation itself; even to his will, which ordains it; and to his power, which executes it: so that to him must all the glory be ascribed by every soul, both in this world and the world to come.]

SEE now, from hence,

1. What a blessing the Gospel is—

[No one needs be told what a blessing showers are to the thirsty earth. Precisely such is the Gospel to the souls of men: "As the rain and the snow come down from above and water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give bread to the eater and seed to the sower; so is the word which proceedeth from God," when accompanied by the Spirit from on high^o. I would that this were duly understood. Persons form strange notions about the Gospel, as though it were of no use but to produce dissensions in families, and enthusiasm in the soul: but its real and true use, as we may see from what took place at the first publication of it on the day of Pentecost, is to "make glad the wilderness, and to transform a desert into the garden of the Lord^p. Let the soul, that has experienced its effects, say, whether any other principles can equal it in power, or any other fruits bear a comparison with those produced by it? Verily, "it bringeth forth fruit in all the world," and "is the power of God unto salvation to all them that believe."]

2. What is to be done, on our part, to render it effectual—

[The earth is said to "open its mouth," to receive the early and the latter rain: and it puts forth all its powers to make a suitable return. Thus should we do: we should be looking up to God for the gift of his Holy Spirit; and open our very souls to receive his gracious communications; and then exert every faculty for a suitable improvement of the grace given. We are to "be workers together with God." We are not to be merely passive, in the receipt of his favours; but active, in employing them to the ends for which they are bestowed. What might we not hope for, if all our hearers came hither with such thirsting spirits, and went hence with such a determination to render unto God the fruits which he requires! Be ye in earnest, Brethren; and we shall see more and more, that, "as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to bring forth, so will the Lord God cause righteousness and peace to spring forth

ⁿ 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7. ^o Isai. lv. 10, 11. ^p Isai. xxxv. 1, 2.

amongst us" in richer abundance than we have ever yet been privileged to behold them^q.]

3. To whom we are indebted, if ever it has become effectual for our good—

[I need not say to whom we are indebted, either for the fertilizing showers, or for the fruits produced by them^r. Nor need I say how cordially every well-instructed soul will acknowledge his obligations to the Lord, saying, "By the grace of God I am what I am^s." In ourselves we have no reason to glory over our more unprofitable neighbour; seeing that "it is God alone who has made us to differ from him^t." But, whilst we give all possible glory to God, from whose free and sovereign grace our blessings have proceeded^u, we must so walk as to shew us that "God is with us of a truth; and that all who behold us may acknowledge us to be "a field which the Lord has blessed."]

^q Isai. lxi. 11.

^r If this be a *Thanksgiving Sermon for Rain*, or for a good Harvest, this idea may be a little enlarged.

^s 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^t 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^u Jam. i. 17.

DCCCCXL.

STRIVING WITH OUR MAKER.

Isai. xlv. 9. *Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!*

GOD is a mighty Sovereign, greatly and exclusively to be feared. To shew that those who were exalted as rivals to Him had no power, he challenged them all to foretell any future event; or, if they could not do that, to acknowledge his supremacy. As for himself, all things were naked and open before him, yea, and were done by him: "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things^a." But, in despite of all the manifestations which he has given of his supremacy, men would still continue to rebel against him: and therefore he warns them of the terrible danger to which they exposed themselves: "Woe to him that striveth with his Maker!"

To elucidate these words, I will point out,

^a ver. 7.

I. The conduct reprobated—

It may be supposed impossible for men to strive with their Maker: but the fact is, that men may do it in a variety of ways:

1. By resisting his will—

[He has made known his will in his written Law — — — But men will not obey it — — — Tell them that God has enjoined this, and forbidden that; and they will spurn at the restraint imposed upon them, and say, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord; neither will I obey his voice^b” — — — And what is this, but downright rebellion? Sure I am, that *we* should account it so, if we were so treated by our child or our servant: and no doubt God will impute it to us as a deliberate resistance of his will.]

2. By murmuring at his dispensations—

[God acts according to his sovereign will, in the dispensations both of his providence and grace. The rich and the poor owe to him their respective lots; as do also all who are appointed to health or sickness, life or death^c. There is not any trial with which man is visited, but it proceeds from him. But where do we find one who, in a state of trouble, has not been ready to murmur and repine? And what is that, but striving with our Maker? So HE construes it^d: and so it will be found in the last day^e. As to the sovereign exercise of his grace, *that* is still more offensive to our proud hearts. Though we claim for ourselves a right to dispose of our own property as we please, we refuse that right to him; as if, in benefiting *others*, he did to *us* an injury^f. The very case is stated by St. Paul; who, having instanced, in the case of Pharaoh, and in the destinies of Jacob and of Esau, the uncontrolled sovereignty of God, states the feelings of an ungodly man: “Thou wilt say unto me, Why then doth he find fault? for who hath resisted his will?” To which he indignantly replies, “Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?” Here, then, we see indisputably in what light God views all such instances of murmuring and complaint: for, in all circumstances whatever, our only wish should be, “Not my will, but thine, be done.”]

3. By rejecting his Gospel—

^b Exod. v. 2. and Ps. xii. 4.

^c Deut. xxxii. 39.

^d The text.

^e 1 Cor. x. 10.

^f Rom. ix. 19—21.

[God, in his Gospel, comes and entreats of man to accept of reconciliation with him through the Son of his love — — — But how do men treat this divine message? They reject it utterly; and say in their hearts, respecting the Lord Jesus Christ, “We will not have this man to reign over us.” In the parable of the wedding-feast, “all who were invited began to make excuse” — — — And thus it is with *us*. Any thing is deemed sufficient to justify our refusal of God’s gracious invitations — — — And from his sentence in reference to *them*, we know in what light he will regard *us* and in what way he will deal with us^g — — —]

The woe denounced against such conduct leads us to consider,

II. The evil of it—

It cannot possibly be painted in too strong colours: for it is,

1. Presumptuous—

[In the words following my text, this is set forth by two very opposite illustrations. Let us conceive a piece of clay, dissatisfied with the form given to it by the potter, rising up against the potter, and accusing him of ignorance or injustice; should we not say, that it was presumptuous in the extreme? Or, let us suppose a child to rise up against his parents; and to ask the one why he did not beget, and the other why she did not bring forth, a more perfect being: should we not think that he arrogated to himself an authority which did not belong to him? Thus, then, it is with all who in any way strive with their Maker: they are altogether out of their place, and, in the whole of their conduct, are guilty of the most unwarrantable presumption.]

2. Foolish—

[Can any one suppose that he shall prevail against his Maker? As well might the clay hope to prevail against the potter, who can see nothing in his work but arrogance and folly. And so God has told us: “The counsel of the Lord, *that* shall stand; and he will do all his pleasure^h” — — —]

3. Ruinous—

[Vain, utterly vain, is such a contest as this. And so we are plainly warned. What would be the issue of a contest between briars and thorns and a devouring fire? Such will be the issue of the strife between God and his rebellious creatures: “Who would set briars and thorns against me in battle? I

^g Luke xiv. 16—24.

^h Isai. xlv. 10,

would go through them, and burn them up togetherⁱ." That pointed interrogation, "Who hath hardened himself against God, and prospered?" must for ever determine this question; and shew, that to "strive with our Maker" is, to involve ourselves in inevitable and eternal ruin — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. In a way of indignant proof—

[Who amongst us has not been guilty of the crime here reprobated? Yea, whose life has not been one continued act of rebellion against God? Now, if it were "our *Maker*" only that had been so treated by us, no words would have been sufficient to declare the enormity of our crime. But our Maker has been our *Redeemer* also; yea, and has given his own life a ransom for us: yet have we "trodden under foot his blood" by our contemptuous indifference, and even "crucified him afresh" by our continuance in sin. Judge ye, then, what we deserve at God's hands. And now let me ask, whether ye intend to persist in this conduct? If ye do, I can say nothing but what Paul said to persons of this character, "Your damnation is just^k" — — —]

2. In a way of compassionate exhortation—

[The Prophet Jeremiah, having stated the very argument before us, and shewn that God might justly, as a potter, mar the work which had presumed to rise up against him, goes on to observe, that, notwithstanding all our past guilt, God is yet ready to forgive us, if only with penitent and contrite hearts we turn unto him^l. And happy am I to confirm this blessed sentiment; yea, and to declare, that not one, whatever may have been his guilt in past times, shall ever be cast out, provided he come in the name of Jesus Christ, founding his hope on His all-atoning sacrifice, and His all-prevailing intercession. As God's servant, then, I now announce to you these blessed tidings; and declare, in God's name, that "though your sins may have been red as scarlet, they shall be as snow: though they have been as crimson, they shall be as wool^m." Only cease from strife on your part, and God will be reconciled to you, and be your God, for ever and ever.]

ⁱ Isai. xxvii. 4.

^k Rom. iii. 8.

^l Jer. xviii. 6—8.

^m Isai. i. 18.

DCCCCXLI.

THE EXTENT AND CERTAINTY OF ISRAEL'S SALVATION.

Isai. xlv. 17. *Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end.*

AS in the dispensations of God's providence we behold a mixture of mercy and judgment, so in the records of his grace we see promises and threatenings continually interwoven. Declarations so opposite, standing in immediate contrast with each other, give to each other a double force and energy, more especially when, as in the passage before us, compared with the preceding verse, they are expressed in similar terms. In this view the promise in the text deserves particular attention. In considering it we shall shew,

I. Who they are that are comprehended under the name "Israel"—

We are not to limit this name to the Jews; nor even to comprehend all the Jews under it; since "all are not Israel that are of Israel^a:" it includes those,

1. Who worship God—

[This name was originally given to Jacob by God himself on account of his having "wrestled all night" in prayer till he obtained the blessing he desired^b. From him it passed to his natural descendants; but has in all ages more eminently characterized his spiritual seed, who, like him, "worship God in spirit and in truth." Our Lord, seeing Nathanael, called him an "*Israelite indeed*;" and, on finding how much Nathanael was surprised by such an appellation from a stranger, assured him that "he had seen him under the fig-tree^c." Most probably Nathanael, supposing that no human eye beheld him, had been praying there to God: and our Lord, adverting to this circumstance as well as to his integrity, addressed him by a name that marked his character in both respects. Thus every true Israelite is frequent at the throne of grace; and God, who seeth in secret, will testify of him, In such and such a place I saw thee lifting up thy heart to me, and imploring my blessing with thy whole soul.]

^a Rom. ix. 6.

^b Gen. xxxii. 24, 28.

^c John i. 47, 48.

2. Who worship God alone—

[There were some among the Jews who feared the Lord, and yet served other gods^d: so amongst ourselves there are many who would be thought to fear God, while they are endeavouring to reconcile the inconsistent services of God and mammon. But Israel stand directly opposed to such characters in the context^e: they not only will not make or worship idols of wood or stone, but they will harbour no idols in the heart: they will not provoke the Lord to jealousy by any hidden abominations^f, but labour to be “Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile.”]

Now since it is promised to such persons that they shall be saved, it will be proper to inquire,

II. In what way they shall be saved—

The Lord Jesus Christ is the person mentioned in the text as the author of their salvation^g: and they must be saved,

1. By the merit of his blood—

[Whatever integrity of heart any man may possess, or however fervent he may be in his supplications before God, he must be saved in the same way as any other sinner, and enter in at the same door with publicans and harlots. His very best services are polluted; and he needs to be cleansed from “the iniquity of his holy things” as much as from the vilest transgressions. Nor is there any other fountain opened for sin but that which was opened upon Mount Calvary: nothing but the blood of Christ can ever cleanse from sin: the holiest man that ever lived must be “accepted *in the beloved*,” “nor is there salvation for him in any other:” even Paul himself, notwithstanding all his legal and evangelical obedience, desired to be “*found in Christ*, not having his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ^h.” And “in the same adorable Lord must *all the seed of Israel* be justified, and must gloryⁱ.”]

2. By the efficacy of his grace—

[It is not by any efforts of their own that Israel are enabled to differ from others: “they are saved, not by the exercise of created power, but in the Lord their God^k.” They must all adopt the same humiliating confession, “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength^l.” Are they strong? it is in the Lord, and in the power of his might^m: do they gain the victory? they must thank God for giving it them through Jesus

^d 2 Kings xvii. 33. and Zeph. i. 5.

^e ver. 16.

^f Ezek. xiv. 3.

^g Compare ver. 23. with Rom. xiv. 10, 11.

^h Phil. iii. 9.

ⁱ ver. 25.

^k Hos. i. 7.

^l ver. 24.

^m Eph. vi. 10.

Christ our Lordⁿ. "In HIM all their fresh springs are found;" "out of HIS fulness they receive continually grace for grace:" and if this lock were shorn, they would instantly become weak as other men^o. Being fully assured of this, they evince that they are the true Israel, by worshipping God in the spirit, rejoicing in Christ Jesus, and having no confidence in the flesh^p.]

For their abundant consolation God declares,

III. The extent and certainty of their salvation—

As to the *certainty* of their salvation, no words can more fully express it, than those which are now before us—

[God absolutely declares that "Israel shall be saved:" lest we should limit our expectations to some temporal benefit, he assures us that the salvation he will afford them, shall be "everlasting:" and lest we should still be slow of heart to believe, he repeats his assertion in terms as strong and energetic as language can afford, or imagination can conceive. The same truth is confirmed in every page of the sacred volume, and *that* too in the richest variety of expression, in order more effectually to engage our minds and establish our faith. And has God spoken all these things merely to deceive us? "Has he said, and will he not do it; has he spoken, and will he not make it good?" Let this then be received as an infallible truth, that whatever may become of others, "*Israel shall be saved*;" nor shall any difficulties, any dangers, or all the conspiracies of earth and hell, ever make void this promise in any single instance to all eternity^q.]

Nor can any thing be added to enhance the *greatness* of their salvation—

[It shall be so *perfect*, that there shall be nothing wanting to complete it. Their "sins shall all be cast into the very depths of the sea." However high their expectations may be raised, they shall "never be ashamed;" nor, however strong their confidence may be, shall they "ever be confounded." They shall appear before God with holy boldness: they may even now, as they shall also at the bar of judgment, adopt the triumphant language of the apostle, "Who is he that shall lay any thing to my charge? It is God that justifieth: who is he that shall condemn? It is Christ that died." Yea, they may lay claim to all that God himself can give in time and eternity; and, neither in time nor in eternity, shall they be disappointed of their hope. Their felicity shall begin the very instant they believe in Christ; and shall be *coeval with their own existence*.]

ⁿ Rom. vii. 25.

^o Alluding to Judg. xvi. 17.

^p Phil. iii. 3.

^q John x. 28, 29.

ADDRESS—

1. The idolatrous worldling—

[It is not only “the maker of idols,” but he who “setteth up idols in his heart,” that is an idolater in the sight of God: if we “love and serve the creature more than the Creator,” we are as truly idolaters, as if we bowed down to stocks and stones; and do not the consciences of many testify, that their hearts are incomparably more set upon the world, than on God? If they compare their devotion before God with their zeal about earthly things, may they not see that they differ widely from the true Israel? Shall we then say to *them*, that they shall be “saved with an everlasting salvation? Should we not speak more truly if we were even to reverse the terms, and declare the judgments of God against them? Yes, indeed; for though they now will scarcely admit a doubt or a fear respecting their eternal state, God has warned them, in the very words before the text, that “they shall be ashamed and confounded, all of them; they shall all go to confusion together.” But is there no way for their escape? Blessed be God, there is: if they believe in Christ, they shall yet be saved; for “there is no condemnation to them that are *in Christ Jesus*”^r: and his command to them is, “Look unto me and be ye saved”^s. Let them but prostrate themselves at the foot of his cross, seeking redemption through his precious blood, and they shall yet become monuments of his pardoning mercy, and his sanctifying grace.]

2. The true Israelite—

["Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord!" What a mercy is it to have God himself saying respecting you, Israel shall be saved! Possibly you may meet with many troubles in your way to glory; but you need not regard them, as long as you have the promise that you shall survive them all. Perhaps, like Paul and those who were with him in the ship, you may be so tossed with tempest, as to be brought almost to despair: but God had promised that not a hair of their head should perish; and though they suffered shipwreck, yet was his word fulfilled to them: for all of them, some on boards and others on broken pieces of the ship, got safe to shore". Thus shall it be with you also. You may, as thousands have before you, suffer the loss of all earthly comforts; but God's word shall not be broken: he has promised; and he is not only able, but determined to perform. Look forward then with comfort to death and judgment, and know that that day which shall be to others the beginning of sorrows, shall be to you the commencement of eternal joy.]

^r ver. 22. ^s Rom. viii. 1. ^t Deut. xxxiii. 29. ^u Acts xxvii. 34, 44.

DCCCCXLII.

JEHOVAH A JUST GOD AND A SAVIOUR.

Isai. xlv. 21. *There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me.*

TO us, who have been habituated from our infancy to hear of none but the true and living God, it seems incredible that man should be so stupid and selfish as to bow down to stocks and stones, and to worship them as gods. But not only is mankind in general prone to idolatry, but even the people of God themselves, who had seen all the wonders wrought by Jehovah in Egypt, were ever ready to turn aside from him, and to worship the work of their own hands. Hence we see so much in the prophetic writings on the subject of idolatry, and in vindication of Jehovah as the only true God. In the passage before us, God has appealed to the evidence which he had given of his exclusive right to the regards of his people; in that he had foretold future events, which came to pass agreeably to his predictions; whilst none of the gods of the heathen had ever pretended to any such power. And in the words before us he maintains his own supremacy, by a further statement of his character as a just God and a Saviour.

Let us consider,

I. The character of God as here stated—

We shall consider it,

1. As contrasted with that of all the heathen deities—

[Whatever their poor deluded votaries might imagine, it was not in their power either to inflict or to avert evil. This is put in a striking point of view by the Prophet Jeremiah: "The customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with an axe. They deck it with silver and with gold: they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm-tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them: for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to good^a."

^a Jer. x. 3—5.

But Jehovah is alike able either to save or to destroy. See whether his justice be not marked in his conduct towards the fallen angels, whom he expelled from heaven for their sin; and towards the antediluvian world, which, with the exception of a single family of eight persons, he destroyed with an universal deluge. See what is his indignation against sin, as marked in the judgments executed on Sodom and Gomorrha. See it, also, as demonstrated in the punishment of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, or of Ananias and Sapphira. But the instances are too numerous to be mentioned. No one can have read the Scriptures of truth, and not see that God is just in punishing iniquity; and that to those who live in sin, he is, and will be, "a consuming fire^b."

On the other hand, he is a Saviour also to all who put their trust in him. Behold his interposition in behalf of Noah and his family, whilst all the rest of the world were destroyed. Or see the deliverance he vouchsafed to his people from their bondage in Egypt; or how he carried them through the wilderness, and established them in the land of Canaan. Or view the miracles wrought by our blessed Saviour and his Apostles; and then say, whether there be any bounds to Jehovah's mercy or power.

But the comparison between Jehovah and the heathen deities would be utterly absurd, if it were not that the more than brutish stupidity of mankind called for such illustrations, for the conviction of their minds.]

2. As shining forth in his own proper and harmonious perfections—

[It is in the union of these two perfections of justice and mercy that the glory of the Godhead is most fully seen. We must look at justice as exercised in a way of mercy, and mercy as displayed in a way of justice, if we would at all appreciate aright the character of our God. He, of his own unbounded love and mercy, determined to save our fallen race. But would he leave sin unpunished? No: he would punish sin, and yet save the sinner: and, in order to that, he gave his only-begotten Son to be the substitute of the sinful man, that *in him* sin might receive its just recompence, and *by him* a righteousness might be wrought out for man; that so God might be just, and yet the justifier of all who should believe in him. By this his justice shines forth more awfully than if he had executed vengeance on the whole human race; and his mercy more richly than if he had pardoned all without such an atonement offered for them. The gift of his only-begotten Son reflects a light on these perfections which can be seen in

^b Deut. iv. 24. and Heb. xii. 29.

nothing else; and which infinitely exceeds any that can be found in a separate and disjointed view of them, as exercised towards our sinful world — — —]

Let us then proceed to contemplate,

II. The regard due to him under that character—

This part of my subject is altogether inexhaustible. But I will confine myself to the mention of three effects, which such a view of the Deity as is here exhibited should produce :

1. Fear—

As for the Heathen deities, there is not one that merits the smallest possible regard. But who will not fear the Lord our God? This is the very improvement which the Prophet Jeremiah suggests, on instituting the comparison between the two: “Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O Lord: thou art great; and thy name is great in might: who would not fear thee, O king of nations^e?” The same reflection is made by all the redeemed in heaven, whilst singing the song of Moses and the Lamb: “They sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy^d.” It is of immense importance, Brethren, that you should duly estimate this thought. For many, from conceiving of God as “a Saviour,” forget that he is “just.” But indeed he is a holy God, that “cannot look upon iniquity without the utmost abhorrence of it^e;” and he has warned us, that, notwithstanding his great delight in mercy, “he will not clear the guilty^f.” No indeed; “upon the wicked he will rain snares, fire, and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup^g.” I say, then, to every one of you, “Fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell: yea, I say unto you, Fear Him^h.”]

2. Trust—

[As persons, previous to the awakening of their souls, are ready to think of God as all mercy; so, after that they begin to be convinced of sin, they are prone to run to a contrary extreme, and to think of God as though he were averse to mercy, and intent only on the vindication of his injured Majesty. But know, Brethren, that mercy is that in which he chiefly delights: “judgment is his strange act,” to which

^e Jer. x. 6, 7.

^d Rev. xvi. 3, 4.

^e Hab. i. 13.

^f Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

^g Ps. ix. 17. and xi. 6.

^h Matt. x. 28.

he never proceeds, till he has exercised forbearance towards us to the uttermost. Call to mind his exceeding great and precious promises; and then say, whether any sinner in the universe has reason to despond, provided only he desire mercy at the hands of God? Or rather, consider what God has done in giving his only dear Son to die for you: would he have done this, if he were backward to the exercise of mercy? Carry all your sins to him, without questioning for one moment his willingness to pardon; and know, that "if you go to him in the name of his dear Son, he will in no wise cast you out¹."

3. Obedience—

[This is due to him from you, *as creatures*: What then is it, *as redeemed sinners*? I will venture to ask, Is there one of you who believes himself obnoxious to his wrath, and yet a partaker of his grace, that would even wish to be released from his obligations to obey him? No: I am sure that every one who views God in his complex character, as "a just God, and yet a Saviour," will desire to honour God with all his faculties and powers; and will consecrate himself to God as a living sacrifice, under a full conviction, that if this entire surrender of himself to God be a necessary, it is no less "a reasonable and delightful, service^k." It is impossible to have any just views of "the love of Christ, and not be constrained by it to live altogether to His praise and glory¹."]

ⁱ John vi. 37.

^k Rom. xii. 1.

¹ 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

DCCCCXLIII.

LOOKING TO CHRIST.

Isai. xlv. 22. *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.*

MANY consider the Scriptures merely as a history of past events, and imagine that the declarations contained in it are to be confined to those persons, for whose *immediate* use they were written. But such an idea reduces the sacred volume to a dead letter, calculated indeed to amuse the curious, but not to awaken the secure, or comfort the feeble-minded. But there are numberless passages which, though originally applied to individual persons, are quoted by the Apostles as applicable to mankind in every age. Doubtless then, the invitation before us, though primarily addressed to idolaters, is intended to be

sounded forth throughout all the world. Let us then consider,

I. The invitation—

The person, who is here speaking, is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ; since the very words following the text are quoted by an inspired Apostle as issuing from his mouth^a. Here,

1. He directs us what means to use in order to salvation—

[“Looking to Jesus” is a figurative expression of the same import with many others used in Scripture, such as coming to him, fleeing to him, &c. Its meaning is obvious, especially when connected with salvation as the end to be attained by it. One immediately perceives the state of the cripple’s mind, of whom it is said, that he gave heed to Peter and John, expecting to receive something of them^b; nor can we be at any loss to ascertain the meaning of looking to Christ for salvation: it must import an humble sense of our lost estate, an ardent desire after his proffered mercy, and a persuasion that he is able to impart the blessings we stand in need of. Without such views, such desires, and such a faith, we should no more look to him for salvation than a person in health would go to a physician, or make use of his prescriptions^c — — — If any thing can clearly exemplify the nature of this duty, it is the state of the wounded Israelites when they looked to the brazen serpent^d: they felt their wounds, they knew them to be incurable by human art, they were convinced that they must quickly perish if they did not use the appointed means, and they turned their eyes towards it in hope of experiencing the promised recovery. And exactly thus must we look to Christ, if we would be made partakers of his salvation^e.]

2. He promises that we shall not use those means in vain—

[His words undoubtedly imply a promise, though they are not delivered in the form of one. They consider all as obnoxious to the wrath of God. They are not addressed to sinners of a peculiarly atrocious character, but to “all the ends of the earth.” But while they thus insinuate that none can save themselves, they offer salvation to all without any distinction of character, provided they follow the direction given them. Such shall surely be saved from wrath: their sins, however great and manifold, shall be forgiven them. The infection

^a Rom. xiv. 10, 11.

^b Acts iii. 4, 5.

^c Mark ii. 17.

^d Numb. xxi. 7—9.

^e John iii. 14, 15.

that pervades their souls shall be healed. Yea, more, the favour of God, the beauty of holiness, and all the glory of heaven shall be imparted to them. The salvation here spoken of is justly called, "The salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory:" and in the name of Christ we can promise it to all who comply with the terms on which it is offered to them.]

Alluring as this invitation is, it derives additional importance from,

II. The arguments with which it is enforced—

That he may prevail on an ignorant and careless world, our blessed Lord reminds them of,

1. His all-sufficiency to save them—

[That Christ is God, is a truth on which our present and eternal happiness depends; nor is there wanting all that evidence for it which the most scrupulous or doubtful mind can require^f. Indeed, if he were a mere creature, however exalted, we might well question his authority to issue such a command, or his ability to impart the promised blessing; but his Godhead at once enforces both his direction and his promise: "Look unto me; for I am God," and enjoin you to do so at the peril of your souls. "You shall be saved; for I am God," and am therefore able to save you to the very uttermost. Were I a creature, you might be afraid to trust in me: but is not the blood of an incarnate God sufficient to make atonement for your sin? Is not the arm of God able to subdue your enemies before you? Or is there any "variableness or shadow of turning in me," that you should question my fidelity? Am I not "the God that changeth not?" Know then that while my Godhead is your warrant for looking to me, it is my pledge to you for the performance of my promise.' My Brethren, can you resist the force of such an argument?]

2. The insufficiency of every other hope—

[We are prone to look to every other being for help rather than to Christ; but he plainly warns us that "there is none else." Could we obtain salvation by any other means, the force of his invitation would be enervated: however the way prescribed by him might deserve a preference, we should feel ourselves, as it were, at liberty to disregard it. But in vain will be our utmost exertions, if we endeavour to save ourselves by any methods of man's device. We are "shut up unto the faith that is revealed." We may as well attempt to create an universe as to atone for sin, or to fulfil the strict commands of God's law. There is no remedy but that proposed, of looking

^f John i. 1. Rom. ix. 5.

unto Jesus: "there is no other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ." Observe then the weight of this argument also: it is as though Jesus had said, "To whom will ye go? I, and I alone, have the words of eternal life^g: if you follow after righteousness in any other way, you will never attain unto it^h: you have but one alternative, to look unto me, or to perish for ever." The Lord grant that, if we be not drawn by love, we may at least be impelled by necessity, to accept his invitation!]

We would yet further ADDRESS this invitation to,

1. Those who are careless and indifferent about salvation—

[How lamentable is it, that Jesus should thus invite sinners, and they be altogether inattentive to his voice! Ye careless and supine, consider Jesus as addressing you upon his first entrance into the world: 'Look unto me, and see how I have humbled myself for you: though I am God, yet have I taken upon myself your nature, that I might save your souls: I am come from heaven to seek and save you; O let not such condescension and love be lost upon you.' Think again that ye hear him speaking to you from the garden of Gethsemane: 'Look unto me, and behold how I am overcome with agony, and bathed from head to foot in a bloody sweat: this, sinners, is for you; it is your guilt that weighs me down, and your curse that I am now enduring: reflect a moment on the evil and danger of your state; for "if these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" if sin has so overwhelmed your incarnate God, how will *ye* endure the punishment of it to all eternity?' Suppose him yet again calling to you from the cross; 'Look unto me, ye perishing world; see what a multitude of sorrows encompass me; and how my heart in the midst of me is even like melting wax, so utterly is it consumed by the fire of divine wrath: see, how I am forsaken by my own Father, and am shortly to expire in the midst of all this shame and torment: but it is for you; to save you from everlasting death: and I shall be satisfied with all the travail of my soul, if only you will look to me for salvation: let me but have the joy of saving you, and I am content: but O, let me not pay the price of your souls for nought.' Once more; view him seated on his throne of glory, and consider him as addressing you from thence; 'Look unto me; it is for your sakes that I am exalted to this throne; it is that I may impart that salvation to you, which once I purchased for you: as once I governed every thing in my divine nature, so now in

^g John vi. 68.

^h Rom. ix. 31, 32.

my mediatorial capacity is all power committed to me, that I may raise you also to a participation of my own glory : and all that I require of you is, to look unto me : O sinners, turn not a deaf ear to my entreaties ; but let me save you with an everlasting salvation.'

Are there now any so obdurate as to disregard his voice ? Say, beloved, is salvation so slight a matter that ye are indifferent whether ye ever obtain it or not ? Or are the terms, on which it is offered, so grievous, that ye cannot bring your minds to submit to them ? What easier terms can God himself propose than those, "Look and be saved?" O delay no longer, but say with the prophet, "I will look unto the Lord ; I will wait for the God of my salvation ; my God will hear me!"]

2. Those who, through a sense of their unworthiness, dare not accept the salvation offered them—

[Persons, who are deeply convinced of their guilt and misery, are apt to think themselves too unworthy to be the objects of divine mercy ; and to exclude themselves from the number of those who are invited : 'Can it be true,' say they, 'that Jesus speaks to me : and that I have only to look unto him in order to ensure my everlasting salvation ? Surely this invitation cannot be for such a wretch as I am : gladly would I accept it, if I dared ; but I shall be only as a dog snatching at "the children's bread."' But, Beloved, why should any of you exclude yourselves ? Does not Jesus address himself to sinners of every description, even to "all the ends of the earth ?" And did you ever hear of one whom he rejected ? If none ever applied to him in vain for the healing of their bodies, shall any look to him in vain for the saving of their souls ? When he gave this invitation, was he not aware how unworthy you were ? Did he not know the extent and efficacy of his own atonement ? Did he not consider whether there was any thing in your case that was too hard for him to surmount ; or did he issue this invitation only to mock and disappoint you ? Let it be granted, you have some reason to doubt his power or his willingness to save you : yet, at least, put him to the trial, and see whether he will fulfil his word or not. Of this you are sure, that, if HE cannot save, no one else can ; and that, if he will not, you will, at least, lose nothing by accepting his invitation. But you need not fear ; he is God ; and "his mercy as far exceeds your sins, as the heavens are higher than the earth." Put away then your desponding thoughts, and "encourage yourselves in the Lord your God." Thus shall you be numbered with his redeemed ; and spend eternity in singing, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb."]

DCCCCXLIV.

EXALTATION OF CHRIST.

Isai. xlv. 23—25. *I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.*

TO those who know the infinite importance of the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, it is delightful to see the irresistible evidence of it in the Old Testament as well as in the New. Who is it that in the two preceding verses says, “I am the LORD, I am God, a just God and a Saviour; there is no God else beside me, there is none beside me, there is none else?” Is this a creature? Who is this that, in the text, presumes to swear by *himself*; that arrogates to himself universal dominion; and that so frequently appropriates to himself the incommunicable name, JEHOVAH? Is this a creature? Who is it that can fulfil the promises here made to his friends, or execute the judgments here denounced against his enemies? Is he a mere creature? No person that is not blinded by prejudice, or warped by controversy, can doubt one moment, but that it is the supreme God, who is speaking throughout the whole passage: yet this very passage does St. Paul expressly apply to Christ, affirming that it was a prediction of his final victory, and of the appearance of the whole human race at his tribunal^a.

For the further elucidation of these solemn words we shall consider,

I. The subject-matter of the oath—

To comprehend this aright, we should *notice particularly* those very opposite circumstances which were appointed to take place, before the predictions in the text were to receive their accomplishment. Christ

^a Rom. xiv. 10, 11.

was to be insulted by his whole nation ; and his claims of Messiahship were to be made the subject of profane ridicule : he was not only to be rejected, but to be crucified as a malefactor, and to die as one unable to save himself : his enemies were to enjoy a momentary triumph ; and his followers to be disappointed, dejected, and confounded. But, that these things should not be a stumbling-block to any, it was here foretold that all these circumstances should be speedily reversed. In this view, the oath relates to four things :

1. The exaltation of Christ—

[Christ, as King of kings, and Lord of lords, had a right to universal empire : every creature was bound to render him an unlimited and unreserved obedience. But it was foreseen that, instead of submitting to him, his creatures would rise up in rebellion against him, and cry out with one voice, “ We will not have this man to reign over us.” Christ, however, laughed them to scorn ; and told them by his prophet, many hundred years before, that every knee should bow to him, and every tongue take an oath of allegiance to him as the only sovereign of the universe ; at least, if they did not do this willingly, as an expression of their unfeigned subjection, they should do it, in effect, against their will, by suffering the punishment due to their rebellion.]

2. The advancement of his kingdom—

[While in the world, he was to be considered as vile, yea, as the vilest of mankind ; and to appear weak as other men : but in due time he was to be regarded, not only as righteous and powerful, but as the only source of righteousness and strength to all his creatures. In themselves, all are “ ungodly and without strength :” feeling therefore their guilt and helplessness they are to “ come to him,” each saying for himself, and each animating others to say, “ In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.”]

3. The confusion of his enemies—

[Notwithstanding his unspotted innocence, and unbounded kindness, he was to be an object of utter abhorrence to his whole nation. But their triumph over him was to be of short duration : the time was soon to come, when they should “ see him whom they had pierced, and mourn.” Their violence was soon to be recompensed upon their own heads, unless by previous repentance and faith in his blood they obtained the remission of their sins. At all events, they should be “ ashamed,” whether penitent and pardoned, or impenitent and condemned. They

should either be made to acknowledge with Paul, that they had been “blasphemers, injurious, persecutors, and the very chief of sinners,” or to confess the justice of that sentence that consigned them over to everlasting misery.]

4. The salvation of his people—

[His enemies are the seed of profane Esau; but his friends are “the seed of Israel,” whose prayers prevailed with God, and whose example they imitate. These were for a time to be as men disappointed of their hopes; but, ere long, their expectations, founded on the word of Christ, were to be abundantly “justified” in the sight of men; and their persons too were to be “justified” in the sight of God; so that both before God and man they should have reason to glory in the name of Jesus. None of them should be left in their forlorn condition; but “all,” all without exception, be made to triumph in him as the Rock of their salvation.]

Such was the exaltation, and such the consequences of it to himself, to his enemies, and to his believing people, which Christ so long before predicted with a solemn oath: in confirmation of which we proceed to state,

II. The certainty of its accomplishment—

If God had simply asserted these things, it could not fail but that they must come to pass; for, “he is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent.” But for our fuller conviction and assurance, he has sworn; and “because he could swear by no greater, he has sworn by himself:” his word is gone forth in righteousness and truth, nor shall it “return,” till every jot and tittle of it be fulfilled. But,

1. It has already been accomplished in part—

[At the hour of his death, his enemies thought that they had gained their end. He, whom they had arrayed in mock majesty, and crowned with a chaplet of thorns, and before whom they had bowed the knee in derision, crying, Hail, King of the Jews! had expired on the accursed tree, an object of universal execration and abhorrence: and his followers were scattered as sheep that have no shepherd. The leader being destroyed, it seemed as if this infant sect, like others that had preceded it, were crushed, and brought to nought. It only remained, that Jesus should be proved an impostor, by watching his tomb for three days; and then their victory would be complete. But in vain were the stone, the seal, the watch: at the appointed hour

he rose triumphant; and the affrighted guards fled to relate the wonderful event. Now began his exaltation, which speedily reversed the scenes that had been exhibited. His enemies already stood confounded; and propagated an absurd falsehood to conceal their shame. The hopes of his disconsolate people were revived by many infallible proofs of his resurrection. They conversed and ate with him, and beheld him in the very act of ascending into heaven. It was but a few days afterwards, when, according to his promise, he sent down the Holy Ghost, and thereby completed the confusion of his enemies, and the triumph of his friends. Instantly no less than three thousand of his most inveterate enemies "bowed the knee to him" and "took, as it were, an oath" of allegiance to him as their rightful sovereign: though they had just before seen him "crucified through weakness," and treated as the most infamous of malefactors, they "came to him" that they might obtain "righteousness and strength." What confusion now seized the rulers, who still retained their enmity against him! All their efforts were in vain: the more fierce their opposition was, the more did the word prevail: so that in a little time, not Jerusalem only, but all Judea, yea the whole Roman empire, was filled with converts to the cause of Christ. Now the disciples triumphed in their turn: and from that time myriads in every place have been "justified by his blood," and have "gloried" in his salvation.]

2. It shall be yet more fully accomplished at the day of judgment—

[It is in reference to this period in particular that the Apostle cites the passage before us^b: and then indeed will it be verified to the uttermost. The submission of his people will be more entire, their acknowledgments more grateful, and their glorying more ecstatic, than they could be in this world; while the subjugation of his enemies, and their confusion before him will be complete. When he shall say, as to those of old, 'Many good works did I for you, for which of them did ye hate me? for you I left my glory, and veiled myself in human flesh; for you I sojourned upon earth, and died upon the cross; for you I sent my messengers to beseech you in my name to accept of mercy: for which of these things was I a stumbling-block unto you?' how will they hang down their heads with shame! Eloquent as they now are in vindication of themselves, they will not *then* have one word to answer. Thus shall it be both to the friends and enemies of Christ: as sure as there is a God in heaven, possessed of faithfulness and power to fulfil his word, so sure shall not one jot or tittle of it ever fail of its accomplishment.]

^b Rom. xiv. 11.

IMPROVEMENT—

1. For conviction—

[Nothing surely can be more calculated to awaken the secure than this solemn oath of Jehovah. Methinks the Deity, to fix our attention and obtain belief, stands forth before the assembled universe, and, with his hand lifted up to heaven^c, swears, “As sure as I am God, thus and thus shall it be with my friends and with my enemies.” Must not then sinners be more deaf than adders, and more obdurate than rocks, if they do not hear, and relent, at the voice of their God? O that men would no longer trifle with their eternal interests! We may argue as we please against the word of God; but we cannot invalidate its tremendous declarations. Let us then believe and tremble, yea, “believe, and obey the Gospel.”]

2. For consolation—

[God, in his oath, consults more immediately the comfort of his people^d. They are, alas! too backward to believe his word; and therefore he confirms it with an oath. Let every subject then of the Redeemer's kingdom rejoice: let their confidence in him both for righteousness and strength be greatly increased: let them never doubt, but that his enemies and their enemies, shall soon become his footstool: let them know, that they are justified from all their sins: and let them glory in him as their God and portion. Difficulties they may, they must, expect; but the word of God shall not be frustrated: “the counsel of the Lord shall stand; and he will do all his pleasure.” Let them only rest on the oath of God, and they shall experience its accomplishment to all eternity.]

^c Alluding to Dan. xii. 7.^d Heb. vi. 17, 18.

DCCCCXLV.

GOD'S CARE FOR HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. xlv. 3—5. *Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb: and even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you. To whom will you liken me?*

THAT men who know nothing of the One true God should form to themselves idols to represent imaginary gods, is not so much to be wondered at: because every child of man feels himself dependent

on some superior Being, though of the nature or character of that being he has no distinct conception. But that persons who have been instructed in the knowledge of Jehovah, and been themselves eye-witnesses of his mighty works, should have any disposition to renounce him, and to place their dependence on idols of wood and stone, is utterly unaccountable, on any other principle than that of man's total depravity, and radical alienation of heart from God. But such is the fact: man is prone to idolatry: his "carnal mind is enmity against God:" and from the time of the departure of the Israelites out of Egypt to the time of their captivity in Babylon, not all the judgments or mercies with which they were visited from time to time could keep them from indulging their favourite propensity. One would have thought that the very things which they had seen, even the deportation of the Babylonish idols by the hands of their enemies, should have been sufficient to convince them, that nothing formed by mortal hands could save a man. The prophet, in Jehovah's name, here appeals to them respecting this: See, says he, what helpless things those idols are! "Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth: their idols (unable to move themselves) were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle; your carriages were heavy loaden with them; *they were a burthen to the weary beast*; and are *themselves gone into captivity*^a." 'But how different from them am I!' says Jehovah: '*They* are carried by their votaries, yea, and by their enemies too, incapable of resistance or of motion: whereas *I* carry my people: I have carried them from the very womb; and I "will carry them to hoar hairs," even to the latest hour of their lives.'

That we may enter more fully into this description which Jehovah gives of himself, let us consider,

I. What he has done for his people—

Jehovah addresses his people here as his children and brings to their minds what he had done for that

^a ver. 1, 2.

whole nation in the wilderness. He had borne them in his arms as a father does his child—

[In the wilderness, when the people were required to march, it must of necessity happen that many females were not in a condition to carry their new-born infants, and more especially as the journeys were often of long continuance. Hence the fathers are represented as carrying their children^b: and under this character God represents himself as having carried them^c. Now the whole nation at that time were precisely in the state of little infants; as ignorant of the way which they were to go; as incapable of providing sustenance for themselves; as unable to protect themselves from enemies, or from a variety of dangers to which they were exposed. They needed in every respect Jehovah's care, as much as a new-born infant the attention of its parents. And all this care did God bestow upon them. From the first moment of their departure from Egypt, he went before them in the pillar and the cloud: he sought out for them the places where they should encamp; he regulated all their motions; he supplied them with bread from heaven, and with water from the rock; he delivered them from every enemy; and carried them in perfect safety for the space of forty years. They were cast upon him, as it were, from the womb; and from the womb he thus administered to them with parental care and tenderness.]

And in this way he still carries in his arms the true Israel—

[The nation of Israel typically represented those, who, as Believers in Christ, are in a spiritual sense the children of Abraham. And these, who are Israelites indeed, are precisely in the state of the Jews in the wilderness, or of infants in their parents' arms. Their incapacity to guide or support themselves is quite as great, and their need of succour from on high as urgent. But God has taken the charge of them, and administered to them whatsoever their necessities required. Look ye back, ye "remnant of the house of Israel," and say, whether God has not incessantly watched over you for good; whether he has not borne with your weaknesses, supplied your wants, directed your ways, upheld you in your goings, and kept you from ten thousand snares, into which you must have inevitably fallen, and by which you must long since have perished, if he had for one hour intermitted his tender care? You cannot but acknowledge, that to you, as well as to the Jewish nation, is that description applicable: "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness: he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his

^b Numb. xi. 12.

^c Deut. i. 31.

eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him^d.”]

But God further intimates,

II. What he has engaged to do for them—

To the Jews he promised a continuance of his care—

[The individuals whom he brought forth out of Egypt he suffered to die in the wilderness, on account of their multiplied iniquities: but the nation, as a nation, he preserved; and those children, whom their unbelieving parents supposed to be doomed to inevitable destruction, he brought in safety to the Promised Land. And though, by their innumerable transgressions, the nation has brought down his displeasure upon them, insomuch that they are scattered over the face of the whole earth, yet are they preserved in a way that no other nation under heaven ever has been, in order that they may ultimately enjoy all the blessings prepared for them. They are at this day living witnesses for him, that “he changeth not,” but is still the same gracious and compassionate God as ever^e.]

To the spiritual Israel also he engages that he will keep them, even to the end—

[“His gifts and calling are without repentance.” “Where he has begun a good work, he will carry it on, and perfect it, unto the day of Christ^f.” If “he has laid in our hearts the foundation of his spiritual temple, he will complete it^h,” and “be the finisher of that faith of which he has been the authorⁱ.” “His ways in this respect are not like the ways of men:” *they*, either from impotence or versatility, often relinquish their plans: *he* never does. In his own mind he considers the blessings which he bestows, not merely as a benefit conferred, but as a pledge of future blessings: “He will not forsake his people, because it hath pleased him to make them his people^k.” Hence we are justified in founding on the experience of past benefits an assured expectation of future: “Thou hast delivered my soul from death: Wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living^l?” The very repetitions in our text strongly confirm this important truth: “Even to hoar hairs *will I carry* you: I have made, and *I will bear*; even *I will carry*, and *will deliver* you.” And to the same effect the Apostle Paul assuring us that God will

^d Deut. xxii. 10—12.

^e This is the import of “I am he.” See Ps. cii. 27.

^f Rom. xi. 29.

^g Phil. i. 6.

^h Zech. iv. 9.

ⁱ Heb. xii. 2.

^k 1 Sam. xii. 22.

^l Ps. lvi. 13.

keep his engagements with us, uses in one short sentence no less than five negatives; “He will never, never leave thee; he will never, never, never forsake thee^m.”]

From this statement of his own ways, he teaches us to infer,

III. His unrivalled title to our regard—

“To whom will ye liken me?” says he to his people of old: Are any of the gods of the heathen able to effect for their worshippers what I have wrought for you? So will I say to those who have received spiritual blessings at his hands: “To whom will ye liken him?” Who in the whole universe has such a title,

1. To your confidence?

[Are there any of the sons of man that could have brought you out of darkness into light, as he has done; or turned you from the power of Satan unto God? Could any of them have preserved you from the snares which Satan has spread for your feet? Who amongst them is able to keep you in future? or have you any sufficiency in yourselves, so as to “direct your own pathsⁿ,” and to maintain your own steadfastness? No, verily: and nothing but a “curse awaits the man who trusteth in man, or who maketh flesh his arm^o.” God alone is equal to this task^p: in him alone therefore must be all our hope, and all our trust — — —]

2. To your love—

[Amongst your fellow-creatures you may have many who, both for their personal qualities and their kindness to you, are entitled to your esteem. But to whom are you indebted, as you are to your Redeeming God? HE has come down from heaven for you: HE has died upon the cross for you: HE has wrought out a salvation for you: HE has by his Holy Spirit imparted that salvation to your souls: HE has given you that measure of stability which you have already evinced; and has engaged his almighty power to keep you even to the end. Where have you ever found such a Benefactor as he? where, one who can vie with him in any one particular? Truly in comparison of him the whole creation is but as the dust upon the balance: and therefore you should love him infinitely above all, and say, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee^q” — — —]

Let me then, in conclusion, ADDRESS myself,

^m Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

ⁿ Jer. x. 23.

^o Jer. xvii. 5, 6.

^p 2 Cor. i. 21. and iii. 5.

^q Ps. lxxiii. 25.

1. To those who entertain a rival in their hearts—

[You can easily see how just God's indignation was against those who worshipped graven images, in preference to him: but know, that he is no less offended with those who "provoke him to jealousy" by "setting up idols in their hearts." He says, and well may say, "My son, give ME thine heart^r." This is his exclusive right: and if you withhold it from him, it matters not what else you give: it is all hateful in his eyes, and never will come before him with acceptance: "your very prayers will be an abomination in his sight^s," and your best sacrifices only as "the cutting off a dog's neck, or offering swine's blood^t"— —]

2. To those who profess themselves to have experienced God's tender care—

[What *gratitude* becomes those who are so indebted to their God! Was Israel highly favoured above the heathen? Their obligations were nothing in comparison of yours. Their blessings, though great, were temporal: yours are spiritual and eternal — — — But look around you and see, how many even of your own friends and relatives are yet in bondage to their sins; whilst you have been delivered with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Look also to those who have been "brought out of the world for a season, and yet been again entangled with it and overcome^u;" whilst you are yet "holding on your way." And who is it that has made the difference between you? Must you not say, "By the grace of God I am what I am?" Stir up then your souls to thankfulness, and say, "By Thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art He that took me out of my mother's bowels: *my praise shall be continually of thee^x*."

And let your *confidence* in him for the future be entire. Lie in his hands precisely as a little infant in its parent's arms; and look to him, exactly as the Israelites in the wilderness did, to direct your every way, and to supply your every want. It is not possible for your reliance on God to be too simple or too entire. In this respect also is David an excellent pattern for you to follow: "Thou art He that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope, when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly. Be not far from me! for trouble is near: for there is none to help. Be not thou far from me, O Lord! *O my strength, haste thee to help me^y*!"

Let your *devotion* to him also be unreserved. "You are not your own, but his; and therefore you should glorify him

^r Prov. xxiii. 26.^s Prov. xv. 8.^t Isai. lxvi. 3.^u 2 Pet. ii. 20.^x Ps. vii. 6.^y Ps. xxii. 9, 10, 11, 19.

with your bodies and your spirits, which are his^z.” *This is what God expects at your hands*: “Ye have seen,” says he, “how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now, therefore, if ye will *obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant*, then shall ye be a peculiar treasure unto me, above all people: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. *These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel*^a.” Yes, these words I do speak to you in God’s name. Your privileges are all a delusion, if they be not productive of this effect: but if they lead to this issue, then is God glorified in you, and ye shall ere long be glorified with him in the realms of bliss^b.]

^z 2 Cor. vi. 20. ^a Exod. xix. 4—6. ^b 2 Thess. i. 11, 12.

DCCCCXLVI.

CHRIST THE SALVATION OF ISRAEL.

Isai. xlv. 12, 13. *Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.*

THEY who deny or doubt the existence of a Supreme Being, may discover his eternal power and godhead by the works of creation, and ascertain his infinite superiority above all false gods, by the numberless predictions which he has given by his prophets, and the never-failing accomplishment of them in their appointed season. To this last criterion God himself refers idolaters in the chapter before us, and challenges them to bring any of their false deities, who should be able to stand in competition with him. To us, who acknowledge his unrivalled glory, there is one thing which displays, in a wonderful manner, the transcendent riches of his grace; I mean, the freeness with which his offers of mercy are made even to the most abandoned of mankind. This remark obviously arises from the words of our text; and will be fully illustrated by considering,

I. The characters addressed—

The words, in their primary meaning, were intended to describe those who were unhumbled by the

judgments inflicted on them in the Babylonish captivity, and unaffected with his promises of deliverance from it. As applied to us, they comprise two common characters :

1. Those who feel no remorse for their past sins—

[All must acknowledge that they have sinned against God, and that, as sinners, they ought to humble themselves before him. But how many never call their past ways to remembrance, or say with themselves, what have I done^a ! Their sins give them no uneasiness : instead of mourning over their offences, they palliate them ; and, instead of imploring mercy at God's hands, they deny that they have any need to deprecate his wrath and indignation. And must not such people be called " stout-hearted ? " If God himself complains of those who represent it as a *vain* thing to serve the Lord, that " their words are stout against him^b," surely the same complaint may justly be made against those who practically declare his service to be a *needless* yoke, and an *intolerable* burthen.]

2. Those who are unconcerned about their eternal salvation—

[Many, alas ! are as improvident about the future as they are unconcerned about the past. They will profess indeed that heaven is a desirable portion ; but they will never inquire seriously whether they be in the way to attain it ; nor ever exert themselves in earnest to secure it. If an empty wish, or a formal round of duties, will suffice for the acquisition of it, they will be content to pay the price : but if they are to run as in a race, and to fight as in a single combat, in order to have it awarded to them, they do not think it worth the contest. What now must we say of these, but that they are " far from righteousness and salvation ? " Surely, if they be far from a *concern* about these things, much more must they be from the *attainment* of them.]

When we reflect upon the characters here addressed, how shall we stand amazed at,

II. The address itself—

The prophet, in these words, foretold both the deliverance of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, and the coming of their Messiah to save the world. To sinners of our day the text declares,

1. That God has provided a Saviour for them—

^a Jer. viii. 6.

^b Mal. iii. 13, 14.

[Christ is undoubtedly that "salvation whom God has placed in Zion," and whom we are commanded to call, "The Lord our righteousness." Him has "God sent into the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" — — — Harken to this, ye stout-hearted: though ye have despised your God, your God has not despised you; but has pitied your fallen state, and made provision for your restoration to happiness. Yes; for the angels that fell, he instantly "prepared" a place of unutterable and everlasting torment^c: but for you he prepared a Saviour, even his only dear Son. And shall not this make your obdurate hearts relent? Or will ye receive such stupendous grace in vain?]

2. That God now offers salvation to them—

[This salvation is nigh to all of us, and the tidings of it are now sounding in our ears. It is placed in this our Zion as much as ever it was in Zion of old. Christ is now present in his ordinances according to his promise; and will be so even to the end of the world. At this very hour he "proclaims liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." To you, even to you, ye stout-hearted, is "the word of this salvation sent." Your past iniquities shall be forgiven, if only you will humble yourselves before him. Nor is this all: your God will not only restore you to his favour, but will "glory" over you with unutterable joy. "You shall be even a crown of glory and a royal diadem in his hands^d." Let not then your hearts be yet hardened against him; but let his transcendent "goodness lead you to repentance."]

ADVICE—

1. Endeavour to see your obduracy in its true colours—

[If you are free from gross sins, you think but little of an unhumiliated and impenitent state. But what can be worse than a seared conscience and a callous heart? What can be worse than to feel no sorrow or contrition for your past offences, no desire to please your God, no anxiety to save your souls? Be assured that such a state, with whatever name it may be glossed over, is hateful in the extreme: and that, if continued in, it will prove as fatal as a course of open profligacy and profaneness.]

2. Fear lest God should give you up to final impenitence—

[The present address, which is made by God himself, shews clearly enough, that he "has no pleasure in the death

^c Matt. xxv. 41.

^d Isai. lxii. 3.

of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." But he is a holy God; nor will his Spirit "always strive with man." He may be provoked at last to "swear in his wrath that you shall never enter into his rest." This he most assuredly does with respect to many, who "grieve his Spirit" till they have altogether "quenched" his sacred motions. "To-day therefore, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts," "lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver."]

3. Think what regret you will feel, when that salvation, which is now so near you, shall be removed to an unapproachable distance—

[Of all the miseries that can afflict a soul in the future world, we cannot conceive any more distressing than the thought of having had a Saviour provided for us, and salvation through him offered to us. No words can express the sense which a self-ruined sinner will have of his folly, when he sees in one view the mercies he has slighted and the judgments he has brought upon himself. Now he can be "far from righteousness," and glory in his shame: but then he will see that, which even courted his embraces here, removed afar off indeed; so far, as to preclude a possibility of ever attaining the possession of it. The Lord grant, that they who have hitherto slighted these overtures of mercy, may now embrace them with their whole hearts!]

DCCCCXLVII.

OFFICES OF THE HOLY TRINITY IN THE WORK OF REDEMPTION.

Isai. xlviii. 16. *Now the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me.*

SO mysterious and important a doctrine as that of a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead ought not to be *founded* on any grounds which are not clear, strong, adequate, convincing. But it may be *illustrated* from passages on which we could not altogether venture to establish it. Such is the passage which I have now brought before you. It might well be supposed, that so important a doctrine as this should pervade the Holy Scriptures, just in the way that all the fundamental doctrines of our religion do; and that there should be intimations of it in many places, where the express mention of it would not be expected to occur.

And this we find throughout the whole Scriptures, as I shall presently take occasion to shew. In the whole chapter which precedes this, from whence my text is taken, God is declaring that he will destroy Babylon, and bring out from thence his captive people, and restore them to their own land: and, throughout the chapter which is before us, he warns his people to bear in remembrance, that he had foretold this event several hundred years before it should be accomplished; and that, consequently, when it should occur, they must trace it, not, as they would be ready to do, to their idols, but to Jehovah himself, who had fore-ordained it for the glory of his own name, and who had designed it to be a type of a yet greater deliverance, which he would in due season effect for a ruined world. It is in this connexion that the speaker says, "Now the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me;" that is, hath commissioned me to announce to you these great events.

But it is a matter of doubt, who the speaker is. If it be the prophet, then the sense of the passage is clear: but if it be the same divine Person as is speaking throughout the whole context, namely, the Son of God, the Saviour of Israel, the Messiah, then a small alteration must be made in our translation; and the passage must be read, "Now the Lord God hath sent me, and his Spirit;" that is, hath sent me to effect this great deliverance, and his Spirit to reveal it to you; and both myself and the Holy Spirit, to accomplish that infinitely greater deliverance that is prefigured by it. *This* is the sense which the most approved expositors adopt, and which therefore I also shall follow: though, as far as respects the use which I shall make of the passage, it is of no moment which construction we prefer; since, in either case, a plurality of persons in the Godhead is clearly intimated. I propose, then, to consider,

I. The distinction of Persons in the Godhead—

I have already observed, that we might reasonably expect the doctrine of the Trinity, if it be indeed true,

to pervade the Holy Scriptures throughout. Accordingly, we do find it more or less clearly intimated from the beginning. Let us trace it in the Scriptures,

1. Of the Old Testament—

[In the very first chapter of the Bible, where the creation of all things is declared, there is a plurality of persons mentioned, as determining to complete the whole by the formation of man: “*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*^a.” So again, at the expulsion of man from Paradise, a similar representation of the Deity is given: “The Lord God said, Behold, the man is become *as one of us*, to know good and evil^b.” At the building of the Tower of Babel, also, the Deity speaks of himself in the same manner: “Go to, *let us go down*, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech^c.”

In like manner, when the Messiah is spoken of, a plurality of persons in the Godhead is almost always marked. Is his qualification for his work stated? It is said, “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him^d.” Is his mission plainly declared? It is said, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek^e.” Is the effect of his mission foretold? It is said, “Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto thee^f.”]

2. Of the New Testament—

[The Saviour’s incarnation was announced in these terms to his Virgin Mother: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore, also, that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called The Son of God^g.” Was he consecrated to his Mediatorial office at his baptism? The account given of it is, “Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo! the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and, lo! a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased^h.” Were disciples to be gathered to him by his Gospel? He said, “Go, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghostⁱ.” Were they to receive all kinds of blessings from God? They are instructed

^a Gen. i. 26.

^b Gen. iii. 22.

^c Gen. xi. 7.

^d Isai. xi. 2.

^e Isai. lxi. 1.

^f Zech. ii. 11.

^g Luke i. 35.

^h Matt. iii. 16, 17.

ⁱ Matt. xxviii. 19.

distinctly to acknowledge the Three Persons of the Godhead; and to pray, that “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, may be with them ^k.”]

But this distinction of Persons in the Godhead will more clearly appear, by considering,

II. The particular offices which they severally sustain in the economy of redemption—

God the Father is the fountain from whom the whole of salvation proceeds—

[It is he who “sends his Son,” and “delivers him up for us all.” It is he, also, who “sends the Holy Spirit,” to apply to our souls the benefits which Christ has purchased for us. On this part of our subject it is unnecessary to enlarge, because respecting it we are all agreed.]

The Lord Jesus Christ has come to procure salvation for us—

[As Mediator, God and man, he was the Father’s servant^l, sent to effect for us this great salvation. In undertaking the work, he voluntarily engaged to redeem us; saying, “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy Law is within my heart^m.” In executing the work, he acted freely throughout, “giving himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice unto God of a sweet-smelling savourⁿ”; yea, on the very cross “he, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot unto God^o.” And, as he voluntarily laid down his life for us, so by his own power he resumed it^p; and went up to heaven to “intercede for us^q,” and “to prepare a place for us^r,” and to administer to us all needful grace^s: and in due time he will come again, and take us to himself^t, and invest us with crowns and kingdoms like his own^u.]

The Holy Spirit applies to us what the Lord Jesus has procured—

[As by the Spirit’s agency the man Jesus was enabled to execute the whole of his work; so, when the Saviour was gone to heaven, the Spirit descended, to complete the work which Jesus had begun. “He testified of Christ,” by the miraculous powers which he imparted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost^x.

^k 2 Cor. xiii. 1.

^l Isai. xlii. 1.

^m Ps. xl. 6—8.

ⁿ Eph. v. 2.

^o Heb. ix. 14.

^p John x. 18.

^q Heb. vii. 25.

^r John xiv. 2.

^s Eph. i. 22, 23.

^t John xiv. 3.

^u Luke xxii. 29.

^x John xv. 26.

He also “glorified Christ, by taking of the things that were his, and shewing them unto his disciples^y.” To this very hour does he, by the mighty operation of his power on the souls of men, “convince them of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment^z.” He “comforts them” in their sorrows^a; he “sanctifies them throughout^b,” he “bears witness to them that they are the Lord’s^c; and he “seals them unto the day of redemption^d.” And at the last day, “as he raised Christ himself from the dead, so will he raise us also” to a final participation of his kingdom and glory^e.

And now, in all this, have I spoken too minutely, or too confidently? I have said no more than what St. Peter has spoken in one short verse; when he said of all true believers, that they are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ^f.”]

Let me now proceed to shew,

III. The comfort which the knowledge of this fact is calculated to impart—

Were I to enter at all fully into this subject, I should not know where to begin, or where to end. But it must suffice to mention two things; which must, of necessity, present themselves to every reflecting mind.

Have the Sacred Three so concurred in the work of redemption? Then we may be assured of,

1. The readiness of God to save us—

[Men exceedingly mistake this matter. They think themselves willing to be saved: they doubt only of God’s willingness to save them. But were men as willing to accept salvation as God is to bestow it, not one would ever perish. Did God, unsolicited, provide us a Saviour? Did the Lord Jesus Christ undertake to effect salvation for us? Did the Holy Spirit engage to apply that salvation to us? and can we doubt whether God be willing to save even the very chief of sinners? I am well aware, that men will pretend to found their doubts only on their own unworthiness. But where is any worthiness to be found in man? Who was worthy, that God should devise this plan; or that Christ should execute it; or that the Holy Spirit should apply it? Or who will presume to stand on the footing of his own worthiness, even of the food he eats, or of

^y John xvi. 14.

^z John xvi. 8.

^a John xiv. 16.

^b 1 Thess. v. 23.

^c Rom. viii. 16.

^d Eph. i. 13, 14.

^e Rom. viii. 11.

^f 1 Pet. i. 2.

the air he breathes? It is not *as worthy* that we are to come to God, but *as unworthy*: and the more we feel our unworthiness, the more acceptable shall we be to God; who bids us come to him for every thing, “without money and without price.” Only reflect on what God has already done for you; and you may well say, “He that hath sent his Son to die for me, and his Spirit to renew me, how shall he not with them also freely give me all things^g?”]

2. The sufficiency of the salvation provided for us—

[What is there that the wisdom of the Father has overlooked? Wherein has the Lord Jesus Christ failed to accomplish the work assigned him? What is there which the Holy Spirit is unable or unwilling to impart? Find some flaw; find some defect; before you call in question either the suitability or sufficiency of this salvation. If you were to be saved by your own power or goodness, you might well be filled with doubts and fears: but when all that the Father's love, the Son's merit, and the Spirit's power can effect, is offered you freely, you must needs say, “All things are mine; and I am Christ's; and Christ is God's^h.”]

Thus have we taken the passage according to a rendering somewhat different from that which our version has given us. But, for our APPLICATION of it, we will take it in the sense in which the translators of our Bible understood it: and we will not only consider it as spoken by the prophet to the Church at his day, but we will even adopt it ourselves, as an address which we at this time are authorized and commissioned to deliver unto you: “Now the Lord God and his Spirit hath sent me,” yes, even *me*,

1. To testify to you of this redemption—

[Prophets and apostles had no other commission than that which is given to every faithful minister of Christ; which is, “to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.” They indeed were inspired; and were, many of them at least, endued with miraculous powers, to which we can make no pretensions: but the message borne by them and us is one and the same, that “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” This ministry of reconciliation, I say, is committed unto us: and “we, as ambassadors of God, beseech you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to Godⁱ’ — — —]

2. To urge your acceptance of it—

^g Rom. viii. 32.

^h 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

ⁱ 2 Cor. v. 20.

[Who amongst you does not need it? The captivity of Israel in Babylon is but a very faint image of your captivity to sin and Satan. And what is there under heaven to be compared with it? If you had crowns and kingdoms, they could not make you happy: and in a short time they would vanish away, and leave you more destitute than the most miserable man on earth. O let me remind you what stupendous efforts have been made by God for you! and let me entreat you not to receive this grace in vain!" — — —]

3. To remind you that all the glory of it must be God's alone—

[This was the principal point which the prophet was ordered to inculcate. The people were in danger of ascribing to their idols what was done by Jehovah alone. And is there not the same tendency amongst you? Are not you prone to think that, in some respect, your own arm has saved you? Who has not often "sacrificed to his own net, and burned incense to his own drag?" O Brethren, remember that "Jehovah is a jealous God," and "will not give his glory to another." I demand of you, therefore, that you give all the glory to the Triune God; and that you begin on earth the song which is prepared for you in heaven, even "blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever^k."]]

^k Rev. v. 13.

DCCCCXLVIII.

GOD'S TENDER CONCERN FOR HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. xlviii. 17, 18. *Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go. O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.*

THE reducing of religion to a system is not without some use; because, by an orderly arrangement of all its parts, we are enabled to attain both a comprehensive and distinct view of the whole. But, when we presume to wrest any passages, or to weaken their true meaning, merely because they do not seem to accord with our system, we usurp a power that belongs not to us, and deprive ourselves of many benefits,

which, if duly humbled, we might enjoy. It cannot be denied that God is the sovereign disposer of all events, and that "the Spirit divideth to every man severally as he will." But shall we therefore imagine that nothing depends on ourselves; that nothing is gained by obedience, or lost by disobedience? "We have not so learned Christ;" nor have we such partial views of his word. We believe, that however free and undeserved the gifts of God are, they would come down to us in richer abundance, if we were more earnest in seeking them; and that the true reason of our possessing so little is, that we labour so little to obtain fresh communications, or to improve those we have already received. If we would not enervate, or rather destroy, the force of our text, we must subscribe to this sentiment: for there God expresses his regret that the obstinacy of his people prevented the descent of his blessings to them; which is a proof, that though his mercies are in some instances sovereignly and freely dispensed, yet they are not arbitrarily withheld from any; or, in other words, though some are elected to salvation, none are lost through an unmerited sentence of absolute and eternal reprobation.

To enter fully into the spirit of our text, it will be proper to consider,

I. Who it is that here addresses us—

When any thing is spoken to us by man, we involuntarily consider who it is that addresses us, and pay attention to the words in proportion to the wisdom, the goodness, or authority of the speaker. If he be a stranger, we feel a comparative indifference towards him; but if he be a friend, a benefactor, a father, we are more observant of every thing he says. Now God frequently expatiates on his own character, in order that he may arrest our attention, and make a deeper impression on our minds. In the words before us, he describes himself by,

1. The relation he bears to us—

[God was related to Israel in a peculiar manner. He had brought them out of Egypt; and they were the only people

that acknowledged him: He was therefore properly "their Redeemer; the Holy One of Israel, their God." The Christian Church, as a body, stand in a similar relation to him; and are in that respect distinguished, like the Jews, from all the idolatrous nations of the earth. But there are some, to whom, in a higher and more appropriate sense, he bears these relations. There are some whom he has really redeemed from sin and death; in whose hearts he reigns; and on whose behalf he exercises all his adorable perfections. Amongst this happy number we profess to be.

With what care and diligence then should *we* attend to the words before us, when we consider them as addressed to us by Him, who bought us with his own blood, and who has given himself to us as our God and portion for ever! — — —]

2. The kindness he exercises—

[As God gave unto Israel both the moral and ceremonial law for their instruction, and guided them through the wilderness for forty years, so is he now the instructor and leader of the Christian Church, who exclusively enjoy the light of revelation. But there are a favoured few, "a little flock," to whom these blessings are vouchsafed in a more especial manner. While multitudes never receive any benefit from the ministration of the Gospel, some are "taught to profit" by it: they are instructed in the knowledge of their own hearts; and are enabled to discern the suitableness of Christ to their necessities, and to live by faith upon him as their only Saviour^a. They are also "led in the way that they should go:" they are brought from "the course of this world in which they were walking," and are guided into the way of peace and holiness^b.

If *we* have experienced these blessings, surely we cannot but "give earnest heed to the things" spoken in the text, since they are spoken by Him, to whose gracious teaching we owe all the knowledge we possess, and to whose protecting care we are indebted for every step that we have taken in the way to Canaan — — —]

Let us listen then with the deepest reverence to the voice of our Benefactor: let us hear,

II. The regret he expresses on our account—

In his words we may notice,

1. The matter of his regret—

[God is not an unconcerned spectator of our conduct. He is not satisfied with giving us his commands, and leaving

^a Acts xvi. 14. 1 John v. 20.

^b Acts xxvi. 18. Eph. ii. 1—5. Tit. iii. 3—5.

us to obey them or not, as we please: he longs to engage our most affectionate regards to him and his service: and, when all his efforts are in vain, he takes up a lamentation over us, as a father over a disobedient and incorrigible child^c. And what abundant occasion has he for regret on our account! He has commanded us to come to him, to live in a state of holy fellowship with him, and to delight ourselves in him. But how deaf are we to his entreaties, and how slow of heart to obey his voice! It is not the ungodly alone over whom he has cause to lament, but even his own people: yes, even they, whose God he is, and whom he has redeemed with his own precious blood; they whom he has instructed by his word and Spirit, and whom he has led by his providential care; even they, I say, grieve him by their inattention, and provoke him to displeasure by their neglect: and so is he at times weighed down, as it were, by their misconduct, that he scarcely knows how to bear with them, or how to act towards them^d.]

2. The reason of it—

[And what is it that occasions his regret? Would he gain any thing by our obedience? or does he lose any thing by our disobedience^e? No: he knows how much we lose by our folly; and it grieves him, that, when he is so desirous of loading us with his richest benefits, we should be so regardless of our own interest and happiness.

If we were uniformly zealous and active in the service of our God, “our peace would flow down” in a serene, uninterrupted course, “like a river;” and “our righteousness,” or prosperity of soul, would “like the waves of the sea,” be exalted, irresistible, and boundless. We should find “the work of righteousness to be peace^f,” we should have great^g, and abundant^h peace; and “in keeping God’s commandments we should have a rich rewardⁱ.” Is there not then cause for regret, that we should be such enemies to our own welfare; and that, instead of enjoying the felicity of God’s chosen, we should scarcely differ, either in comfort or holiness, from the ungodly world around us? Yes; if angels rejoice over our prosperity, they may well join with their Maker in pathetic lamentations over the greater part of the Christian Church.]

INFER—

1. How bitter will be the reflections of the ungodly in a future world!

^c Matt. xxiii. 37. and Luke xix. 42.

^d Amos. ii. 13. Jer. iii. 19. Hos. xi. 8.

^f Isai. xxxii. 17. ^g Ps. cxix. 165.

ⁱ Ps. xix. 11.

^e Job xxii. 2, 3.

^h Ps. lxxii. 7.

[Now God laments over them; but they regard him not: *then* they will lament over their own state; and he will not regard them. *Then* they will adopt the very language of the text: "O that I had hearkened to God's commandments! then would my peace at this moment have been constant as a river, and boundless as the sea." I should not have been in this place of torment: I should not have been weeping and wailing and gnashing my teeth in hopeless agony, as I now do: no; I should have been like those in Abraham's bosom; I should have been holy as God is holy, and happy to the utmost extent of my capacities or desires. O fool that I was! O that I had hearkened to God's commandments! I was warned, but would not believe: I was exhorted, but would not comply: O that it were possible to obtain one more offer of mercy! But, alas! that is a fruitless wish — — —

Beloved Brethren, Why will ye not consider these things before it be too late?]

2. How blessed may the ungodly yet become, if they will only seek after God!

[The words of the text were spoken in reference to the very people who were afterwards carried captive to Babylon; and therefore they may be considered as addressed to every individual amongst us. God is not willing that any of us should perish^k: he desires rather that we should come to repentance and live^l. He is as willing to be their Redeemer, and their God, as to be the God of any person in the universe. He would teach and guide them as cheerfully, and as effectually as he taught the Prophets and Apostles of old. "O that they were wise, and would consider these things! they should surely then understand the loving-kindness of the Lord^m:" they should be filled with "a peace that passeth all understanding," and have, both in their purity and joy, a sweet foretaste of their heavenly inheritance.]

^k Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

^l 2 Pet. iii. 9.

^m Ps. cvii. 43.

DCCCCXLIX.

CHRIST THE LIGHT AND SALVATION OF THE GENTILES.

Isai. xlix. 6. *And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.*

THAT the Gentiles were to be received into the Church of God, was a truth which the Jews were

backward to admit. Several years after the Gospel had been preached to the Jews, Peter declined visiting the Gentiles, and was afterwards called to an account by the Apostles themselves for going to them^a; nor could any thing but repeated miracles in their favour overcome the prejudices which he entertained respecting them. Not but that the conversion of the Gentiles had been very frequently and plainly foretold. The very passage before us, if there had been no other, was quite sufficient to raise an expectation of that event. In the context there is a conversation between Jehovah and his Son. The Messiah announces to the Gentiles his qualifications for the work to which he was called^b; but at the same time complains that his labours among the Jews were almost in vain^c. Nevertheless He declares his unshaken confidence that Jehovah would not leave him without ultimate success^d. Jehovah then, in answer to his Son, assures him, that however he may be treated by the Jews, he shall be upheld and accepted in his work^e; and that his failure among the Jewish nation shall be far overbalanced by his success among the Gentiles.

To elucidate this prophecy, we shall consider,

I. The characters here given to Christ—

There can be no doubt but that the words of the text relate to Christ—

[They are far too strong to be applied to Isaiah himself; nor could they with propriety be spoken of any but the Messiah. The expressions here used are similar to those which the prophet elsewhere uses in reference to him^f: they were evidently alluded to by the patriarch when he took up the infant Jesus in his arms^g, and are expressly quoted by St. Paul as having received their accomplishment in Christ^h.]

To him the characters, there specified, most eminently belong. He is “the Restorer of Israel,” having

^a Acts xi. 1, 2. This was six or seven years after Christ's ascension.

^b ver. 1—3.

^c ver. 4.

^d ver. 4.

^e ver. 5.

^f Isai. xlii. 1, 6. and lx. 3.

^g Luke ii. 30—32.

^h Acts xiii. 46, 47.

reconciled “many myriads” of them to God. He is also the “Light of the Gentiles”—

[Another prophet describes him as “the Sun of Righteousnessⁱ.” In the New Testament also he is repeatedly called “the Light of the world^k.” Others have enlightened the world by revealing the will of God; but He alone reveals it by his Spirit to the souls of men: He only, who opened Lydia’s heart, can have access to ours^l: He only, who opened the understanding of his disciples, can illumine our benighted minds^m; and this he does for them that lie in darkness and the shadow of death. While his once favoured people the Jews are blinded, he takes the veil from our hearts, and guides us into all truth. Thus does he abundantly fulfil to us his gracious promiseⁿ.]

He is moreover “the salvation of men even to the ends of the world”—

[Many of the judges and kings of Israel were saviours in a temporal view; but Jesus imparts to his followers a far more glorious salvation. By his own blood he has “obtained an eternal redemption” for them, and by his meritorious obedience he renders them completely righteous. He is not merely a Saviour to them, but “salvation” itself. As he procured, so he imparts, maintains, and perfects the salvation of those who trust in him. There are none so remote but he extends to them the benefits of his death. “He came to save the lost,” in whatever quarter of the globe they be. For this very end was he sent into the world by his heavenly Father; and, as being expressly appointed to this office, he is called *God’s* salvation.]

In fulfilling these characters, he displays,

II. The excellence of the dispensation committed to him—

The dispensation of the law to the Jews was glorious—

[There was much of the Gospel communicated in and with the Law. The ceremonial rites were altogether “shadows of the good things” which were afterwards to be more fully revealed. The moral law itself, while it condemned the Jews, was intended to promote their salvation; and many, in different ages, were guided to heaven by the light which was then afforded them. The Mosaic law therefore was a rich

ⁱ Mal. iv. 2.

^k John i. 4, 9.

^l Acts xvi. 14.

^m Luke xxiv. 45.

ⁿ John viii. 12.

blessing to that nation, and the salvation of a remnant from among them clearly manifested the efficacy of the great sacrifice.]

But the dispensation of the Gospel to the whole world is incomparably more glorious—

It brings far greater good to men—

[We must not disparage the salvation of one single soul ; much less should we undervalue the mercy shewn to so many of the Jews ; but still, the Jews were a small body, when compared with the Gentile world, and it was but a little remnant, even of them, that obtained mercy ; but the publication of the Gospel to the Gentiles has been the means of saving unnumbered myriads. There are persons in every quarter of the globe, who experience the efficacy of the Redeemer's blood ; yea, every day and hour are multitudes ascending from the darkest corners of the earth to swell the chorus in heaven. How much more glorious then is the dispensation which diffuses its blessings so extensively, than that which confined them to such a narrow sphere ! Surely it would have been "a light thing to save the Jews" in comparison of such a multitude. We may well therefore apply to this subject those words of the Apostle—.]

It brings also far greater glory to the Saviour himself—

[Had none but Jews been saved by him, he might have appeared partial in his regards, or it might be thought that his sacrifice was but of a limited value ; but the extension of mercy to the Gentiles displays "the exceeding riches of his grace," and shews that his death is a sufficient "propitiation for the sins of the whole world." How transcendent is the Redeemer's glory in this view ! And how glorious will he appear, when all that he has redeemed from every nation of the earth shall unite in ascribing salvation to him ! The saving of a few from one nation only would not have been a suitable recompence for his work. He might well have complained that he had "spent his strength for nought ;" but he will be fully "satisfied with the travail of his soul," because so enlarged will be his Church, that "the birth of her womb will be as the dew of the morning^p."]]

We shall conclude with a word of two of ADVICE—

1. Welcome the Saviour under the characters which are here given him—

[We all need him as the light of our minds, and the Saviour of our souls. Let none then boast of the light of

^o 2 Cor. iii. 9—11.

^p Ps. cx. 3.

reason, or "lean to their own understanding;" nor let us trust in our own goodness to merit, or strength to work out, salvation. Let us rather look to Jesus for the teaching of his word and Spirit, and unite our acknowledgments with those of the saints of old^a. Let us rejoice exceedingly that "help is laid upon One so mighty^r," and let us receive him for all the ends for which he is offered to us^s. Let none say, I am so far off, I can never hope for salvation by him. His exhortation recorded by the prophet yet sounds in our ears^t; nor shall any be ashamed who put their trust in him.]

2. Do not attempt to separate his characters, but unite them—

[In vain shall we hope to be saved by Christ, if he have not enlightened our understandings. Though he gives not to all his people the same degree of knowledge, he invariably instructs them in the most important truths; and if we have no views of the evil of sin, the deceitfulness of the heart, the beauty of holiness, and the suitableness of his salvation, we are still in a lost and perishing condition. The text itself informs us that Christ becomes our salvation by being our light. On the other hand, let us not rest in a speculative knowledge of these things. We must manifest the practical and sanctifying effects of what we know. We must be delivered from the love and practice both of open and secret sin. Without this, the clearest perception of divine truths will be of no avail. Let us unite in our experience what is thus united in Christ, and seek to grow as well in gracious affections, as in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour^u]

^a Isai. xlv. 24.

^r Ps. lxxxix. 19.

^s 1 Cor. i. 30.

^t Isai. xlv. 22.

^u 2 Pet. iii. 18.

DCCCCL.

CHRIST'S FUTURE REIGN.

Isai. xlix. 7. *Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers; kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.*

OF prophecy we may say, that it is by far the most satisfactory evidence which we have of the truth of our holy religion. Yet it is not altogether the number of the things that have been foretold respecting our blessed Lord, no, nor even the minuteness of them, that carries the fullest conviction to our minds:

it is the strangeness of them, and the great improbability that such things should ever have combined in our Lord and Saviour: *this*, I say, it is which renders the prophecies so demonstrative of the Messiahship of Jesus. For, suppose that God had determined to send his only dear Son into the world for our redemption, and to inform us beforehand what an appearance he should make in the world, and what a reception he should find; what should we expect to be declared concerning him? Certainly we should expect that God would send him in a way suited to his august character; so that by the very splendour of his appearance he should manifest his relation to God, and carry conviction to the minds of all who should behold him. We should expect that his reception should perfectly accord with this. In truth, we could conceive no other, than that, if God should manifest himself in human flesh, and more especially if he should, in proof of his divine mission, work innumerable miracles, which, whilst they could admit of no doubt, should shadow forth the salvation which he was come to impart, all of necessity must love him, and acknowledge him as their Lord, and give themselves up to him as his obedient followers. And if the general tenour of prophecy had accorded with these views, and represented him as to be so received, it would have precisely answered the expectations we had formed. But in proportion as the prophecies corresponded with our previous expectations, they would have been divested of their force. It is the contrariety of the prophecies to all human expectations that gives them such weight: for the less the events predicted could be expected by men, the more, provided they were really accomplished, they would shew that they had proceeded from God; who alone could foresee what should really occur, or think of accomplishing his purposes by such extraordinary means. Now the prophecy before us commends itself to us most highly in this particular view; since its representations of the Messiah are such as no finite intelligence could ever have anticipated; and

its statements of events are such as could never have been expected to flow from the mission of *such a person* into the world.

Let us consider,

I. The representation which is here given of the Messiah—

The words before us are an address of the Father to his own Son, under the character of the Messiah. And behold the description given of him !

Nothing can be conceived more humiliating—

[It is here predicted, that he should be an object of contempt and abhorrence to his whole nation, and, though in himself the Creator of heaven and earth, be regarded by the Rulers as the meanest slave. But can it be of the Messiah that such things are foretold? Yes, of the Messiah himself, who was to be known and distinguished by these very marks : so that, if any person, professing himself to be the appointed Messiah, should not answer to this character, it would be a sufficient proof that he was an impostor. If he be the Messiah indeed, he must be one “whom men despise, and the whole nation abhor,” and who, by “the Rulers,” is treated as a slave.]

This, however, was the character of the Lord Jesus Christ—

[Never was a being more despised than he. His whole appearance was contemptible in the eyes of those who looked for a temporal prince ; so that he was indeed “a root out of a dry ground, having no form nor comeliness ; and they who saw him could find no beauty in him, for which he was to be desired^a.” In truth, he was as “a worm,” and no man ; a reproach of men, and despised of the people^b.” Nothing was too contemptuous to say of him, nothing too insulting to do unto him. Some said of him, “He is a gluttonous man, a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners^c :” others even appealed to himself for the justness of their reproaches ; “Say we not well, that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil^d ?” And when they could not deny his miracles, they denounced him as a confederate with Beelzebub, and as acting by a power derived from him^e. To express their utter contempt of his pretensions as the promised Messiah, they “arrayed him in mock majesty, and spat upon him, and smote him, saying, Tell us who smote thee^f ?” In this “the whole nation” concurred.

^a Isai. liii. 2.

^b Ps. xxii. 6.

^c Matt. xi. 19.

^d John viii. 48.

^e Matt. ix. 34.

^f Matt. xxvii. 29, 30. Luke xxii. 64.

The Rulers would on no account suffer Pilate to release him: the people "with one voice cried out, Crucify him! crucify him!" and "desired that Barabbas, who was a murderer, should be granted to them in preference to him." Crucifixion was a death to which none but slaves were doomed: but nothing less than that would satisfy the Rulers; who having dragged him before the different tribunals of Pilate, and Herod, and the High Priest, consigned him over, at last, to that death which was regarded as accursed both by God and man^g.]

And that same character attaches to him at this very hour—

[I need not say how his name is cast out both by Jews and Gentiles. I will speak of him rather as he still appears even in the Christian world. I grant that *nominally* he is regarded with great veneration and respect; but *really* he is treated, and *that* too even by his professed followers, just as he was in the days of old.

What is there in his religion that conciliates the regards of men? It is at this very hour, no less than in former ages, to self-righteous pharisees "a stumbling-block," and to those who are wise in their own conceit "foolishness^h." To stand indebted wholly to the Lord Jesus Christ for righteousness and strength, and to give the whole glory of our salvation to him alone, is thought as absurd in this day, as it was, in the Apostle's days, to look for salvation to one who saved not himself, but was crucified as a malefactor. In like manner to devote oneself entirely to him, and to live altogether to his glory, is deemed a ridiculous excess at this day, just as much as it was in the days of old. Does any one doubt this? Look then at any person who preaches fully and faithfully the cross of Christ; and say whether his doctrine be not despised as in days of old? or look at any one that truly follows Christ, and see whether there be not, as arising out of that very circumstance, a good measure of contempt and obloquy cast upon him by his friends and relatives. See whether "the offence of the cross have ceasedⁱ." See whether Christ be not still hated and persecuted in his members, just as he was in his own person, though not altogether with the same malignity. Yes truly, his obedient followers are still regarded as "the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things^k:" and if they be not treated as in former days, it is not owing to any change that has taken place in the hearts of their enemies, but to the protection afforded by the laws, where Christianity is the religion of the land.

^g Gal. iii. 13.

ⁱ Gal. v. 11.

^h 1 Cor. i. 23.

^k 1 Cor. iv. 13.

Now this I consider as an evidence in favour of the Gospel which we preach. If our doctrine and its professors were generally approved by the world, it would give very just ground to suspect that our sentiments were not those of the Apostles; since our blessed Lord foretold that his disciples should "be hated of all men for his name's sake¹;" and St. Paul also has declared that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution^m." But our blessed Saviour was treated as the Prophet Isaiah had foretold; and, both in his doctrine and in his members, he is still treated precisely as he and his inspired Apostles have given us reason to expect.]

We are not however discouraged: nor need we be, if we consider,

II. The determination of God respecting him—

God has decreed that all mankind shall bow to the sceptre of his Son—

[Kings and princes, however great in the eyes of men, are as much under the control of God as the meanest of the human race: and in God's good time they shall all, even all throughout the whole world, submit themselves to him: "they shall see, and arise, and worship him." Yes verily, dishonoured as the Lord Jesus Christ has been, and despised as he still is, and especially among the great and mighty, "he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high;" and "kings," being brought to a just consideration of his character, "shall shut their mouths at him" with the profoundest reverence". Nor shall he be thus regarded only by his ancient people the Jews: the remotest monarchs of the earth shall honour him: "the kings of Tarshish and of the Isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts: yea, *all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him*^o."]

For this he pledges both the veracity of his word and the immutability of his counsels—

"All princes shall worship him, *because of the Lord who is faithful*." Jehovah has not only said, "I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion^p;" but he has confirmed his word with an oath, saying, "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone forth out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me (in my incarnate state) every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear^q." Now this word is not gone forth in vain. It began, in some small degree, to be accomplished even in the apostolic age; and still more when

¹ Matt. x. 22.

^m 2 Tim. iii. 12.

ⁿ Isai. lii. 13, 15.

^o Ps. lxxii. 10, 11.

^p Ps. ii. 6.

^q Isai. xlv. 23.

Christianity was embraced by the head of the Roman Empire. But a mere nominal subjection to him, such as is now professed amongst the princes of Christendom, is not that allegiance of which my text speaks. No: there shall be a willing and unreserved subjection to him amongst all the kings of the earth, and all the kingdoms of the world shall become his undisputed empire^r. It has been promised to the Messiah himself: "Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the utmost ends of the earth for thy possession^s." It has been promised also to the Church of God: "Kings shall be thy nursing-fathers, and Queens thy nursing-mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet^t." And "hath God spoken thus, and will he not make it good?"

"His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure^u." "He hath chosen^x" the Lord Jesus to be his servant; and "given him for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth," and to redeem the inhabitants of it from their bondage^y: and who shall change his purpose, or obstruct the execution of his will? In the covenant he entered into with his own Son, he engaged, that, "when his Son should make his soul an offering for sin, he should see a seed who should prolong their days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands: yea, that he would give unto him the great for a portion, and divide unto him the strong for a spoil^z." And we may be perfectly assured, that this stone, however disallowed by the professed builders of the Church, "shall become the head of the corner^a:" yea, "this stone, cut out without hands, shall break in pieces all the kingdoms of the world, and establish one undivided empire over the face of the whole earth^b."]

BEHOLD, then,

1. What a glorious period is fast approaching!

[Assuredly, what is here foretold shall be fulfilled in its season. Was Jesus, "after all his humiliation" unto death, exalted above all the principalities and powers of heaven, earth, and hell^c; and shall not all that hath been predicted concerning him be fulfilled? Yes; "He shall be king over all the earth: there shall be but one Lord, and his name one^d:" and if any refuse to bow to the sceptre of his grace,

^r Rev. xi. 15. ^s Ps. ii. 8. ^t ver. 23. ^u Isai. xlv. 10.

^x The concluding words of the text should have been translated in the past tense. See Vitrina in loc.

^y Compare ver. 8, 9. with ch. xlii. 1.

^z Isai. liii. 10—12.

^a 1 Pet. ii. 6, 7.

^b Dan. ii. 34, 35, 44, 45.

^c Phil. ii. 6—11.

^d Zech. xiv. 9.

"they shall be broken in pieces, as a potter's vessel^e." Contemplate then this day, when all, without exception, "shall be righteous^f;" when "holiness to the Lord shall be written upon the bells of the horses;" and when "there shall no more be found a Canaanite in the land^g." Did Abraham, at the distance of two thousand years, rejoice at his glimmering prospect of the Redeemer's first advent^h; and shall not we rejoice in the glorious consummation which is now so fast approaching? Surely the heavens and the earth should rejoice, yea, the "hills should break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field should clap their hands," at the prospect which we now enjoy of a speedy and universal establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom upon earthⁱ.]

2. What encouragement have they who minister in holy things!

[The Prophets and Apostles had much to contend with, in their day; and some of them saw, at the time, but little fruit of their labour. But would one among them think either his labours or his sufferings too great, if he could now see what exists upon the face of the earth, among the saints of God? How much less, then, will they grudge their services, when they shall behold the Lord Jesus reigning in his millennial glory; and still less, when they shall see the full and entire fruit of their labours in the heavenly world! Let those, then, who engage in the service of their Lord, whether in the contracted circle of a single parish, or in the more enlarged sphere of a mission to the heathen, contemplate the benefit which may be hoped to arise from their labours; and *that*, not at the first moment of their exertions, but at a more remote period, when perhaps a "little one, whom they shall have begotten to the Lord, shall have become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation^k." Let every one that is engaged in this blessed work gladly "do all things, and suffer all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory^l." And if only they be permitted to sow the seed, let them remember, that the day is coming, "when they who sowed, and they who reaped, shall rejoice together^m."]

3. How happy are they who truly believe in Christ!

[*The same things has God decreed respecting you, as concerning his dear Son; and on the same grounds does he assure*

^e Ps. ii. 9.

^f Isai. lx. 21.

^g Zech. xiv. 20, 21.

^h John viii. 56.

ⁱ ver. 13. with Ps. xcvi. 4—9.

^k Isai. lx. 22. N. B. If this be the subject of a *Mission Sermon*, this thought must be enlarged.

^l 2 Tim. ii. 10.

^m John iv. 36.

them to you. Like the Saviour himself, you shall be hated and despised of men: but, like him, you shall triumph over all your enemies, and be exalted to thrones of gloryⁿ. Even “Satan himself,” with all the principalities and powers of hell, “shall be bruised under your feet shortly^o” — — — And would you be certified of this? Know, that “God has chosen you to salvation^p,” and “promised you eternal life^q,” And who shall set aside his purpose? Who shall make his promises of no effect? Look forward, then, to the issue of your present conflicts. Let it be a light matter in your eyes to be an object of scorn and derision to ungodly men: (rather rejoice that you are permitted so to resemble your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ^r;) and look forward to the same blessed recompence as he himself received. “He, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God^s,” so do ye also expect assuredly, that, if you are conformed to him in sufferings, you shall also be conformed to him in glory: for “if you suffer with him, you shall, as sure as God is true, reign with him also in glory for ever and ever^t.”]

ⁿ Rev. iii. 21.^o Rom. xvi. 20.^p 2 Thess. ii. 13.^q Tit. i. 2. 1 John ii. 25.^r 1 Pet. iv. 13.^s Heb. xii. 2.^t 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12.

DCCCCLI.

THE GREATNESS OF CHRIST'S SALVATION.

Isai. xlix. 8—10. *Thus saith the Lord: In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; that thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.*

TO the Messiah God had promised, that, after his inconceivable degradation, he should be exalted, inasmuch that the kings and princes of the earth should bow down and worship at his footstool^a. In the passage before us, the same idea is amplified and enlarged. Jehovah had said to him, “Ask of me, and

^a ver. 7.

I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession^b." And in the Epistle to the Hebrews we are informed, that "in the days of his flesh he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears; and was heard^c." Whilst he prayed for himself, he interceded also for all his people, to the very end of time^d. For them also was he heard; as we are told in the words which I have just read: "In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will give thee for a covenant of the people, that thou mayest cause them to inherit the desolate heritages."

In these words, together with those which follow them, we may see,

I. The promised diffusion of the Gospel—

To enter properly into the meaning of the passage, we must bear in mind the redemption from Babylon, to which there is a manifest reference. Not that the redemption from Babylon is here predicted: that has been very fully and largely spoken of by the prophet in the foregoing parts of his prophecy. He soars far above that subject in this place; and speaks of the redemption of the whole world by the Lord Jesus Christ, though in terms applicable to the other event. The whole of Judea was desolated by the Chaldean invaders: and, on the proclamation of Cyrus, the people were permitted to resume their former inheritances, and to repair the desolations throughout the land. In like manner, the whole world, which has been desolated by sin and Satan, is here spoken of as to be repaired by the Lord Jesus Christ, at the period foretold in prophecy, even at "the accepted time."

1. This was begun in the apostolic age—

[The Lord Jesus Christ, after all his sufferings and death, was raised from the dead; and, after all the efforts made by men and devils to suppress his rising cause, "was preserved;" yea, and was "made a covenant-head to all the people of the

^b Ps. ii. 8.

^c Heb. v. 7.

^d John xvii. 9, 20, 24.

world;" that, by believing in Him, they might regain all that they had lost in the first Adam, and all of which sin and Satan had despoiled them. Holiness was the possession, and heaven the heritage of man, whilst he retained his innocence: but he lost them; and must be restored to them by the Lord Jesus Christ: and, through the preaching of the Apostles, multitudes, not of Jews only, but of heathens also, were restored. Those who were bound, as it were, in chains, and immured in dungeons, were liberated by the Lord Jesus Christ; and they came forth, even as Lazarus had done, at his bidding, and became visible and living monuments of his power and grace. "Being made free by him, they became free indeed^e." Hence St. Paul, expressly referring to the prophecy in my text, declared that the period spoken of was then arrived: "Behold, *now* is the accepted time: behold, *now* is the day of salvation." But,]

2. It is still existing at this present moment—

[To this hour, in despite of all the powers of darkness, yea, and of the weakness and wickedness of man, are the interests of Christ and his Church still "preserved." Thousands do yet look to him as their Covenant-head, and receive through him all the blessings of salvation. Blessed be God! we yet see, I trust, in the midst of you, those who "have been begotten again to an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away^f;" and who, by the word and Spirit of God, are "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God^g." "To those, therefore, who are yet in prison I feel myself authorized to say, Come forth; and to those who are in darkness, Shew yourselves." I declare that this is the accepted time, as truly as that was in the apostolic age; and that "no one, who will come to Christ, shall ever be rejected^h." "To you, Beloved, is the word of this salvation sent:" and without hesitation I declare unto you, that "all who will believe in Christ shall be justified from all thingsⁱ."]

3. It will be completely and fully arrived in the Millennium—

[However low the cause of Christ may sink (and it has sunk very low at different periods since its first promulgation), it shall be "preserved," yea, and shall be "established" too, over the face of the whole earth. There is not in the universe a people, however ignorant or enslaved in sin, who shall not be "brought forth into the marvellous light of his Gospel." Jews and Gentiles shall alike partake of his blessings. For all,

^e John viii. 36.

^f 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

^g Acts xxvi. 18.

^h John vi. 37.

ⁱ Acts xiii. 39.

beholding Christ as their Covenant-head and Surety, shall obtain an interest in the covenant which he has ratified, even in the covenant which is "ordered in all things and sure." A blessed day will that be! Methinks the whole creation is groaning and travelling in pain for its arrival. The deliverance from Babylon was but a very faint emblem of that day: for from Babylon a small remnant only returned to possess their former inheritance; but, at the period of which we are speaking, a redeemed world "shall come with singing unto Zion," and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God."]

In connexion with the spread of the Gospel, the prophet proceeds to state,

II. The felicity of those who shall embrace it—

Here, the reference to the redemption from Egypt, which had long since taken place, and that from Babylon, which was yet future, must be more distinctly noticed. Both the one and the other of those far exceeded all that could have been expected, and all that could have been supposed within the verge of possibility. The obstructions to that from Egypt, especially, appeared utterly insurmountable. For, how should such a multitude be fed? How should they be screened from the heat, which, at seasons, must be too oppressive to be borne? How should they also be conducted through a wilderness which was utterly unexplored? And how should they find refreshment in a land where there were neither rivers nor springs? These difficulties had been overcome through the good providence of God; and whatever may be supposed to correspond with them in the spiritual life shall also be vanquished by all who commit themselves to Christ as "their Leader," whom they will follow, and "their Commander," whom they will obey^k.

He here assures to his people,

1. Provision—

[He that gave his people bread from heaven for the space of forty years will be at no loss to "feed" his flocks, however numerous, in this dreary wilderness; or to give them ample

^k Isai. lv. 4.

“pasturage,” even on the summit of the most barren “mountains.” “A feast of fat things has he provided for us¹; yea, and has “spread a table for us in the presence of our enemies^m.” “The meek therefore may rest assured that they shall eat and be satisfiedⁿ.” “their souls shall be satisfied, as with marrow and fatness^o,” and in the strength of the divine communications they shall be enabled to go forward, finding no labour too arduous, no difficulty too great, for them to surmount^p.]

2. Protection—

[One of the greatest obstacles to the progress of unprovided travellers is the intense heat of the sun, which frequently destroys those who are exposed to its fiery rays. But to his people, when assaulted by persecution or temptation, Christ himself will be a shelter, even “as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land^q.” “Neither heat nor sun shall smite them.” True it is, that, in the apostolic age, myriads were persecuted even unto death; and even at the present time there are but few followers of Christ who have not a cross to bear: but still is this prophecy fulfilled; because, if afflictions abound, our consolations much more abound; and, instead of feeling the rays of the sun intolerable, we are enabled to “glory in tribulation,” and to “rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer either shame or death for Christ’s sake^r.”]

3. Guidance—

[The cloud, which covered the camp of Israel from the action of the solar rays, was a pillar of fire to light them by night, and went before them in all their journeys. So our blessed Lord will lead his people now, and make their way plain before their face. His word shall mark their path; his Spirit shall shine upon it; his providence shall open it from time to time; and thus “he will guide them by his counsel, till at last he receive them to glory^s.”]

4. Refreshment—

[To God’s people in the wilderness the fatigues of travelling were great, notwithstanding all the advantages they enjoyed; insomuch, that “they were greatly discouraged by reason of the way.” And we too, through the weakness of human nature, shall often be ready to faint in our heavenly journey. But God will “lead us by springs of water,” where we can at all times quench our thirst, and refresh our weary

¹ Isai. xxv. 6.

^m Ps. xxiii. 5.

ⁿ Ps. xxii. 26.

^o Ps. lxiii. 5.

^p 1 Kings xix. 7.

^q Isai. xxxii. 2.

^r Rom. v. 3. Acts v. 41. and xx. 24.

^s Ps. lxxiii. 21.

souls. Our blessed Lord promises that we shall have his Spirit within us, as "a well of water springing up unto everlasting life^t."

But in this last communication, methinks I see, as it were, a heaven upon earth; for the description given us of heaven itself is conveyed in the very words of my text: "They are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and He that sitteth on the throne dwells among them. And they hunger no more, nor thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat: for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes^u."

Such was the blessed state of the Church in the apostolic age — — — And such it is at this very hour — — — And such, only in a far more exalted degree, shall it be in the day when Christ shall take to him his great power, and reign unto the ends of the earth.

ADDRESS—

[And now, let me ask, Who amongst you does not need this salvation? Who amongst you, if not already liberated by divine grace, is not at this hour in bondage to sin and Satan, death and hell? — — — But I am happy to declare, that "now is an accepted time, and a day of salvation," to all who will "lay hold on the covenant" of grace, and embrace Christ as he is offered in the Gospel. And why should it not be an accepted time to you, my Brethren, as well as unto God? Is there any other time better than the present? — — — And are not the advantages which are here proposed to you sufficient for your encouragement? Is it a light matter to be emancipated from your thralldom, and to be brought forth into light and liberty? Is it a small matter to have every thing provided for your journey, and eternal glory at the end? What would you have more in this dreary wilderness than God has here promised you? What, if I should proceed to open to you the richness of the provision, the strength of the protection, the certainty of the guidance, the sweetness of the refreshment; especially if we view in it, as we may, the glory and felicity of heaven? But I trust that more is not necessary. "This is the heritage of all the servants of the Lord." Let it be yours. Beg of God that you may be begotten to it; and become "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Never

^t John iv. 14. and vii. 37, 38.

^u Rev. vii. 15—17.

forget that Christ has purchased it for you; and offers it to you, as freely as ever he did redemption from Egypt, or from Babylon, to his ancient people. I pray God that not one amongst you may fall short of this inheritance; but that all of you may possess it, by faith in this world, and by actual fruition in the world to come.]

DCCCCLII.

GOD WILL NOT FORGET HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. xlix. 14—16. *But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget: yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.*

WERE the glorious truths of Christianity allowed their due operation on the hearts of men, this world would be a scene of universal peace and happiness: “the heavens and the earth, the mountains,” and the valleys would form one harmonious concert, all singing aloud for joy at the glad tidings of redemption through the sufferings of our incarnate God. But the great mass of mankind disregard the tidings as “a cunningly devised fable;” whilst multitudes who profess to believe them, derive no comfort from them, by reason of the corrupt state of their own minds, and the hard thoughts which they entertain of God. In the verse preceding our text, we see what reason there is for joy; but in the text itself we are told, how lamentably the proper influence of the Gospel is counteracted by the mistakes and errors of God’s professing people, which yet he is endeavouring by all possible means to rectify.

We here behold,

I. The Church’s complaint against God—

The complaint, in its primary sense, may be understood as uttered by the Church in Babylon, where her state was indeed most disconsolate. Moreover, in the present dispersion of her members, which has now continued so many hundred years, we may find

a further ground for the complaint, that she is forsaken and forgotten of her God. St. Paul, aware that there was in appearance some reason for such an apprehension, states the question, "Has God cast off his people?" and then, by an appeal to fact, he establishes the truth which is asserted in our text, in opposition to it^a.

But it is in reference to individuals, and not to the Church at large, that we shall consider the complaint. It is common for persons under the Christian dispensation to adopt the language of our text. We will therefore state,

1. The *occasions* that most generally give birth to it—

[Among the various causes of such a desponding apprehension, the first to be noticed is, *a long continuance of some temporal affliction*. Little as we think of God in a state of prosperity, and little as we are inclined to mark his hand in the earlier stages of adversity, when we have long been oppressed with trials, our mind almost of necessity reverts to him as the author of them; and *that* too, not in a way of meek submission, but in a way of murmuring and discontent. Thus did the Church in David's days: she complained that God had cast her off^b; and adduced all her trials as proofs of her assertion^c: and then, as though God were asleep, and had altogether forgotten her affliction, she entreats him to "awake, and arise" for her relief^d. Thus also did Job, though on the whole a perfect man, sink at last under his troubles, and become the accuser of his God^e. And perhaps, if we inquired diligently into the first causes of despondency, we should generally find that it has originated in temporal afflictions, which have put the soul off its balance, and disposed it to entertain hard thoughts of God.

Another occasion of such apprehension is, *a long continuance of guilt upon the conscience*. After we are sensible that we have sinned, we are frequently a long time before we can humble ourselves before God as we ought to do: and whilst that hardness of heart continues, it is impossible but that we must be harassed with much disquietude. Thus it was with David, after his sin in the matter of Uriah: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long: (for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me:) my

^a Rom. xi. 1—5.

^b Ps. xliv. 9.

^c Ps. xliv. 10—14, 22.

^d Ps. xliv. 23—26.

^e Job iii. 23, 24. and vi. 2—4.

moisture is turned into the drought of summer^f." That "iniquities will separate between us and our God, and cause him to hide his face from us," is certain^g: but we are not therefore to conclude, that he has forsaken and forgotten us; since, however he may "speak against us," as with the voice of an enemy, "he does earnestly remember us still; yea, his bowels are troubled for us," till, by our humiliation and contrition, we open a way for him to exercise, consistently with his own honour, his tender mercy towards us^h. Nevertheless, till that reconciliation takes place, the distress of a soul that dreads his displeasure must be great indeedⁱ.

One more occasion of such apprehensions is, *a want of answers to prayer*. When God is following us with invitations to accept of mercy, we think nothing of months or years: but, if he delay an answer to our supplications, a few days or weeks appear an age; and we begin to conclude, that he will never vouchsafe us any answer at all. Perhaps, of all reasons for despondency, this is the most justifiable; because God has so often promised to hear and answer the prayers of his people: and from hence we may account for those sad complaints, which David, the man after God's own heart, uttered against his God^k. Doubtless it is distressing to be constrained to say, "I cry in the day time, and thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent:" but the proper reflection for the soul in such cases is, "Thou nevertheless continuest holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel^l."

2. The *dispositions and principles* from which it springs—

[Whatever be the *occasion* of desponding apprehensions, they always arise *from a morbid state of mind*: for, if we were in a right frame, we should, under all circumstances, say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him^m."

At the root of all despondency will be found *impatience*. We do not like to wait God's time: we would "walk by sight, rather than by faith;" and, if we have not immediately what we desire, we are ready to ask, "Is the Lord amongst us, or notⁿ?" We have a surprising exhibition of this spirit among the more religious part of the Jews in the time of the Prophet Jeremiah: God had denounced his judgments against the whole nation; and had refused to hear any prayers that should be offered for them^o. Upon this they complain, "Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? Hath thy soul lothed Zion? Why

^f Ps. xxxii. 3, 4.

^g Isai. lix. 2.

^h Jer. xxxi. 20.

ⁱ Ps. xxxi. 9, 10.

^k Ps. lxxxviii. 1—7, 9, 13—16.

^l Ps. xxii. 3, 4.

^m Job xiii. 15.

ⁿ Exod. xvii. 7.

^o Jer. xiv. 10, 11.

hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing for us? We looked for peace, and there is no good; and for the time of healing, and behold trouble. We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers; for we have sinned against thee. Do not abhor us, for thy name's sake; do not *disgrace the throne of thy glory*: remember, *break not thy covenant with us*^p." Now, after every allowance which must be made for the condescension of God in permitting his people to plead with him, we cannot but think, that the terms here used savour of impatience; and that a more respectful and reverential language would have better comported with their state. But strong feelings usually issue in hasty and unadvised expressions.

Another source from which these apprehensions spring, is *Unbelief*. The promises of God are as clear as the powers of language can express: but we know not how to believe them. Sometimes they appear too good to be true: at other times we doubt whether they are made to *us*: and at other times we are ready to think that they *cannot* be fulfilled; yea, the very providence of God seems to oppose their accomplishment. Hence we listen to the dictates of sense, and, because of our present distress, conclude that God hath forsaken and forgotten us. This was the unhappy experience of David himself, who was brought by his trouble to ask, "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? *doth his promise fail for evermore?* Hath God *forgotten to be gracious?* hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies^q?" Well might he add, "This was my infirmity^r;" for a dreadful infirmity it was, to entertain such distressing apprehensions for himself, and such injurious thoughts of God. Yet thus it is, that, under the influence of unbelief, multitudes are yet daily dishonouring their God.

But we must not omit to mention, that these apprehensions frequently proceed also from *disease of body or mind*. There is a nervous habit of body that is very apt to produce the feelings we are now speaking of; and, the mind partaking of the weakness of the body, Satan takes advantage of it, to impress on the imagination every thing that is gloomy and melancholy: 'God has not elected me: I am given over to a reprobate mind: I have sinned away my day of grace: I have committed the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost: It is in vain for me to pray; for my doom is sealed: God has entirely forsaken me, and, as to any purposes of his grace, has eternally forgotten me.' This is indeed a most distressing state of mind; and the more so, because the persons so affected have not the least conception from whence all

^p Jer. xiv. 19—21. ^q Ps. lxxvii. 7—9. ^r Ps. lxxvii. 10.

their distresses arise. Their apprehensions about God have the same effect on them as if they were founded in truth: and it often happens, that a man's whole life is embittered by fears, which the restoration of bodily health would remove at once. It seems probable that David, whose experience, under all the diversified circumstances of his life, is so fully recorded in the Psalms, had somewhat of this trial also; for, under the united pressure of bodily and mental disease, he doubted whether he should ever be restored to a sense of the Divine favour^s. But, at all events, it is desirable that they who have to deal with troubled consciences, should be aware that this apparently religious depression is often little more than a bodily disorder; and that they should in many such cases recommend a physician for the body, as the most likely means of curing, what, to an ignorant observer, would appear a disease of the soul.]

From hearing Zion's complaint against God, let us turn our attention to,

II. The consolatory reply of God to her—

God desiring that his people should be filled with "strong consolation," has given them such assurance of his care and love, as shall be abundantly sufficient to dissipate all their fears, if only they rely on his word. That no part of his address to them may escape our notice, let us consider,

1. The assurance that he gives them—

[Let the Church's complaint be borne in mind; because to that his answer is immediately directed. She had said, "The Lord hath forsaken me; my Lord hath forgotten me." To this he answers, "I will not forget thee;" or, as it is most tenderly expressed in another part, "O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me^t." Assertions to the same effect occur in numberless other passages of Scripture, and under a variety of forms^u: but no where is it made with greater force than in the passage before us. He appeals to us respecting the care of earthly parents over their offspring. A father is represented as full of pity towards his suffering child^x, and as sparing with affectionate regard his duteous son^y. It is even taken for granted, that a parent *cannot* disregard, and much less mock, the necessities of his child, "giving him a stone when he asks for bread, or a scorpion, when he desires an egg^z." And, if a father cannot act thus, how much less can a

^s Ps. vi. 1—7.

^t Isai. xlv. 21.

^u 1 Sam. xii. 22. Heb. xiii. 5, 6. Mal. ii. 16. Rom. xi. 29.

^x Ps. ciii. 13.

^y Mal. iii. 17.

^z Matt. vii. 9—11.

mother turn her back upon her sucking infant, and forget to administer to its necessities, when even her bodily feelings, no less than the tender emotions of her mind, must interest her deeply in supplying its wants. Rare as are instances of a mother being entirely destitute of natural affection, some have been found who, through shame, have murdered their own offspring, and, through the pressure of famine, have even devoured them. It was foretold that such instances would occur^a; and we know that they did occur at different times^b: but, says God, though there may be found, not only one but many such unnatural mothers, no such forgetfulness of my children shall ever be found in me; I will never forget my Church at large, nor any individual of it in particular. As for my Church at large, "I will keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it day and night^c:" and, as for the weakest individuals that are found in it, I will consider them as infants with whom I have travailed in birth; and will carry them in my bosom, till time and age have worn away their strength, and covered their heads with hoary locks^d. Both collectively and individually, "Mine eye shall be upon them from one end of the year unto the other end of the year^e;" and not only shall "their place of defence be the munitions of rocks, but bread shall be given them, and their water shall be sure^f."]

2. His confirmation of it—

[To confirm his assertion the more strongly, he introduces two striking and well-known illustrations. The first is taken from a custom which prevailed among the Jews, of imprinting on their flesh, by punctures or by staining, an image of the temple, in order at all times to bring it to their remembrance. 'Now,' says God, 'I have you, and all my children, imprinted thus upon my heart, and on my arms^g. I have set you there as a seal or signet, which shall operate at all times to remind me of you, and to interest me in your favour: yea, "I have graven you on the palms of my hands;" so that *I can never open my hand to dispense blessings to any of my creatures, but I must instantly behold your name*, and be stirred up to supply your every want.' What a beautiful and encouraging representation is this! Nor is the other illustration at all less comforting to the mind. It refers to an architect, who, whilst he is only just beginning to lay the foundation, has a perfect idea of the whole building in his mind, and sees it there as plainly as if it were already complete. Thus does God even now

^a Lev. xxvi. 29.

^c Isai. xxvii. 3.

^f Isai. xxxiii. 16.

^b 2 Kings vi. 28, 29. Lam. iv. 10.

^d Isai. xlvi. 3, 4.

^g Cant. viii. 6.

^e Deut. xi. 12.

behold the entire building of his Church complete in all its parts, not a stone wanting, or out of the place ordained for it; yea, he sees also every individual stone formed and fashioned according to his sovereign will, and fitted perfectly for the situation which in his eternal counsels he has appointed it to fill. To a common eye all may appear at present a scene of confusion: but to him who seeth all from the beginning, all is in perfect order as far as it has advanced; and the whole edifice is, as it were, already prepared as a meet habitation for the God of heaven^h.

Say then, Whether there be any ground for the complaint which we have been considering? Can God have forsaken his people, when he is ever present with them? Can he have forgotten them, when he is incessantly carrying on his work in their hearts? He may, it is true, for wise and gracious purposes, so veil himself, that they shall not immediately behold him; but he can no more forget his redeemed people, than he can forget the interests of his beloved Son, or the honour of his own perfections. This he has stated in the fullest manner, for the comfort of his peopleⁱ———and, whether we believe it or not, he will accomplish every jot and tittle of it in its season. As he has no inducement to falsify his word, so he *will* not, “he *cannot*, deny himself^k.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have forsaken and forgotten God—

[Hear ye the complaint which God utters; “Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me, days without number^l.” Alas! how true is this of multitudes amongst ourselves! Though “He is the fountain of living waters, yet have we forsaken him, and hewn out to ourselves cisterns that can hold no water^m.” We have even laboured to blot out the remembrance of him from our minds: and so thoroughly have we succeeded in this impious attempt, that, as the Searcher of hearts himself testifies, “God is not in all our thoughtsⁿ.” Every vanity has been harboured in our minds; but we have found there no room for God: in short, we have lived “without God in the world.” What astonishing wickedness is this, that when God has been following us with invitations and entreaties all our days, saying to us, “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” we have “refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped our ears that we should not hear^p.” This however cannot always continue: God “will

^h Eph. ii. 20—22.

^k 2 Tim. ii. 13.

ⁿ Ps. x. 4.

ⁱ Isai. liv. 7—10, 17.

^l Jer. ii. 32.

^o Eph. ii. 12.

^m Jer. ii. 13.

^p Zech. vii. 11.

not always strive with us" in this manner: the time is coming when he will requite us according to our deeds, and turn a deaf ear to all our entreaties^q? O that we may be wise in time, and improve aright "this day of our salvation!"

2. Those who think they are forsaken and forgotten of God—

[This may be the state even of the best of men; for David, and even the Messiah himself, in a season of dereliction, cried, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" Nevertheless, for the most part, the hidings of God's face may be traced to some special cause: some inward lust unmortified, or some wilful neglect indulged. Search out then, and put away, whatever is displeasing to your God. But, if you cannot find any particular reason for the dispensation, then follow that advice of the prophet, "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and yet walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God^t." Let him plead with God, as David did, and sum up his petitions with that bold request, "Arise, O God, and plead thine own cause^u!" We may be sure that "God will not contend with us for ever, because he knows that our spirits would fail before him, and the souls which he hath made^x." Even where we have been wilfully rebellious, he gives us reason to hope, that, for his own sake, he will heal our wounds, and speak comfortably to our souls^y: but, if we humble ourselves before him, then are we sure that in due season he will lift us up^z.

Let every one then, however disconsolate he may be at the present moment, yea though heaven, earth, and hell should seem conspiring to destroy him^a, check his unbelieving fears, and say, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance, and my God^b."

^q Prov. i. 24—31.

^r Compare ver. 8. with 2 Cor. vi. 2.

^s Ps. xxii. 1.

^t Isai. l. 10.

^u Ps. lxxiv. 19—22.

^x Isai. lvii. 16.

^y Isai. lvii. 17, 18. and Hos. ii. 14.

^z Jam. iv. 10.

^a Ps. xlii. 7.

^b Ps. xlii. 11.

DCCCCLIII.

PROMISED INCREASE OF THE CHURCH.

Isai. xlix. 18—23. *Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the Lord, Thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all as with an ornament, and bind them on thee as a bride*

doeth. For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants; and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been? Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders: and kings shall be thy nursing-fathers, and their queens thy nursing-mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

TO consider past events, and especially those recorded in the Holy Scriptures, is obviously the duty of every man; since from them we learn the true character of God, and know what we are to expect at his hands. Nor are present things to occupy a small portion of our regard: for, though we cannot judge of them with certainty, or declare what their ultimate issue will be, we behold them stamped with a visible impression of Divine wisdom and goodness: the very chastisements of heaven, if viewed aright, convey to us the idea of parental love. But we have a further duty, which is, to look into futurity, and to read in the page of prophecy the events that are yet future. We are not indeed to expect that we ourselves shall be enabled to prophesy, or to obtain such an insight into futurity as to discover the times and the seasons which God has reserved in his own hands: but there are certain great events which shall assuredly come to pass, and which it is our privilege to look forward to, as the pious Jews waited for the coming of their Lord, and looked for redemption in Jerusalem. Indeed it is for this end that the prophecies are given us; namely, that having expected the completion of them, we should acknowledge God in the events whereby they are completed.

In the passage before us, there is a prophecy relating to the future state of the Church: in discoursing upon which we shall notice,

I. The promised increase of the Church—

In the verse preceding our text, the substance of the promise is contained^a: and in our text itself, its accomplishment is represented as actually begun.

In two respects is the Church to be increased;

1. In number—

[To enter fully into the spirit of this prophecy, we should call to mind the state of Israel in Palestine. The land of Canaan was but a small tract of country, when compared with the numbers that were to inhabit it; so that some of the tribes, particularly Dan, and Ephraim, and Manasseh, complained of the smallness of their lot^b. But, after the desolations occasioned by the Assyrians and Chaldeans, the population was so reduced, that they were quite insufficient to inhabit the cities, or to cultivate the ground^c. Imagine now the people all on a sudden restored to their country, and multiplied far beyond all former precedent; what surprise would be excited, and what universal clamour for want of room! Such is the change which is here predicted in relation to the Church: the numbers that shall be added to it will surpass all human expectation, so that “space shall not even be found for them^d.” In every country, in every city, in every village, yea in every congregation also, shall converts spring up as the piles of grass in the earth^e, and “shall say in the ears of the Church, The place is too strait for me: give place for me that I may dwell.” The Church herself shall be filled with utter amazement at the multitudes that flock to her; and shall say in her heart, “Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone: these, where had they been?”

Incredible as this may appear, the prophet not only foretells it, but speaks of it as at that moment taking place before his eyes; and of God himself, as swearing that the whole multitude shall become brighter ornaments to the Church, than the richest jewels to a bride^f.]

^a In Bishop Lowth's Translation it stands thus: “They that destroyed thee shall become thy builders; and they that have laid thee waste, shall become thine offspring.”

^b Josh. xvii. 14—18. and xix. 47.

^c 2 Kings xxiv. 14.

^d Zech. x. 10.

^e Ps. lxxii. 16.

^f ver. 18.

2. In honour—

[It is not the poor only that shall devote themselves to God in that day, but the rich also. Hitherto “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble have been called^g :” but then it shall not be so: for all the great and mighty of the earth “shall bring their sons in their arms, and their daughters (in litters) upon their shoulders; and kings shall be the nursing-fathers of the Church, and queens her nursing-mothers.” As for the enemies of the Church, they shall all be prostrate before her, and “lick up the very dust of her feet :” and God shall be as manifestly revealed among them as ever he was in the days of old^h.

Is it asked, How shall this great change be effected? We answer, “*God* will lift up *his* hand to the Gentiles, and set up *his* standard to the people :” he will cause the standard of the cross to be erected in every place, and by the influence of his Spirit will reveal his Son in the hearts of men; “making them willing in the day of his power,” and rendering “his Gospel the power of God to the salvation of their souls.”

Perhaps in this passage there is a more immediate and explicit declaration of the way in which God’s ancient people the Jews shall be converted to the faith. We have reason from St. Paul to think, that an extraordinary conversion of the Gentiles shall precede the restoration of the Jewsⁱ: and here, it should seem, that God will make the efforts of those Gentiles instrumental to the conversion of his once-favoured people: “I will lift up mine hand to *the Gentiles*, and *THEY* shall bring *thy* sons in their arms, and *thy* daughters on their shoulders.” Surely this thought should animate us to diffuse as far as possible the knowledge of salvation through the heathen world, that, the Gentiles being made partakers of this grace, the Jews may be provoked to jealousy to seek it for themselves^k.]

Let us now contemplate,

II. The encouragement it affords us for Missionary exertions—

Is such a glorious prospect held forth to us, and shall we be indifferent about it, or entertain a doubt of its being realized in due season? No: we will expect it rather, and by anticipation rejoice in it: for,

1. God is able to effect this great thing—

[Were this promised event to be produced by human efforts only, we might well doubt whether it should ever be

^g 1 Cor. i. 26.

ⁱ Rom. xi. 25, 26.

^h ver. 23.

^k Rom. xi. 11—14.

accomplished. But God has taken the matter into his own hand; and has said "*I will do it; I will lift up my hand to the Gentiles.*" And, if God will work, who shall let it? It is worthy of remark, that St. Paul himself grounds his assured expectation of these events on this very consideration of God's almighty power. Speaking of the Jews being again grafted into their own olive-tree, he says, "They, if they abide not in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is *able* to graff them in again¹." In the very chapter before us also, God mentions his all-powerful interposition as an effectual antidote to all the unbelieving fears of his people. The Church, doubting almost the possibility of the promised events, asks, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?" Can it be hoped, that they who are in bondage to such powerful adversaries, and have even sold themselves, as it were, by their iniquities, should ever be redeemed? Yes; "thus saith the Lord; Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away; and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for *I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children*^m." Let us expect it then at the hands of God, knowing that "what he has promised, he is able also to perform." Let difficulties, how great soever they may appear in themselves, be as nothing in our eyes, because that Omnipotence is engaged to surmount them all; and "nothing can be too hard for the Lord."]

2. God has moreover actually engaged to effect it—

[Survey the promise in our text, confirmed by a most solemn oath, and therefore "confirmed by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have the stronger consolation." Compare with it many other passages of Holy Writ, which speak decidedly to the same effectⁿ——— Shall all these fail of their accomplishment? Surely "God is not a man that he should lie, or a son of man that he should repent." As to "the times and the seasons, he has reserved them in his own power: but the ultimate accomplishment of them, if we may so speak, he has put out of his own power; because "He cannot deny himself;" and he has himself assured us, in reference to this very thing, that "his gifts and calling are without repentance^o."]

3. The beginnings of it are already visible before our eyes—

[What the prophet says by anticipation, we may almost speak literally: "Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold:

¹ Rom. xi. 23. ^m ver. 24, 25.

ⁿ Isai. liv. 1—3. lxi. 4—6. and lxvi. 18—20. ^o Rom. xi. 29.

all these gather themselves together, and come to thee." Since the apostolic age, there has been no period like the present^p; all nations making peace in the spirit of peace; and societies of every kind combining, not in this land only, but in foreign lands also, to translate the Scriptures into all languages, and to impart them to every nation under heaven. Is not this the finger of God? and is not God's display of his own almighty operation a motive and a call to us to work together with him? Doubtless, if ever there was a time that we were particularly encouraged to engage in missionary exertions, it is now: "The sound is already gone forth in the tops of the mulberry-trees;" and therefore this is the time for us to "bestir ourselves: God is already gone out before us^q;" and he will be with us in all that we put our hands unto.]

We CONCLUDE with pointing out our duty in reference to this great event;

1. Let our expectations of it be enlarged—

[St. Paul represents the whole creation as waiting and longing for this blessed period^r: and shall not *we*, "we, who already have the first-fruits of the Spirit^s;" shall not we be expecting this glorious harvest? Shall we not look forward with holy joy to that time when "all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ^t?" O glorious day! The Lord hasten it in his time! — — —]

2. Let our prayers for it be poured forth—

[We cannot contemplate the universal reign of peace, and love, and holiness, without feeling an ardent desire that it might immediately commence, or without crying unto God, "How long, O Lord, wilt thou not have mercy on the world, against which thou hast had indignation almost six thousand years^u?" Indeed God has particularly commanded that we should pray to him on this subject, and not give him rest, till he arise and answer our petitions^x — — — We are not to imagine, that because the period is fixed in the Divine counsels, it is therefore in vain for us to pray: for God has invariably connected the accomplishment of his promises with the prayers of his people; and however absolute his promises may be, "he will yet be inquired of, to do the things which he has promised^y."]

3. Let our exertions be used—

^p June 5, 1814, three days after the tidings of peace with France had arrived.

^q 2 Sam. v. 24.

^r Rom. viii. 19—22.

^s Rom. viii. 23.

^t Rev. xi. 15.

^u Zech. i. 12. and Rev. vi. 10.

^x Isai. lxii. 1—7.

^y Ezek. xxxvi. 36, 37.

[God works by means: and it is by a blessing upon our efforts that he will accomplish his own gracious purposes. In this view, the answer which he gives to the petitions of his Church on this subject is very remarkable. The Church, in terms the most appropriate that can be imagined, entreats him to arise and execute this great work: "Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord! awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old! &c. &c.^z" And what is his reply? Does he content himself with renewing his promises to fulfil their desire in due season? No: he says, "Awake, awake! stand up, O Jerusalem^a!" and again, "Awake, awake! put on thy strength, O Zion! shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem! loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion^b!" And so far is our entire dependence upon him from being a reason for listless inactivity, that it is the strongest reason for putting forth our utmost exertions: we must "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure^c." Let all of us then awake for the occasion, and inquire, What we can do for the advancement of the Gospel, either at home or abroad? How can we aid the different Societies that are established for these ends? Let us consider our time and our talents, our wealth and our influence, yea, our bodies and our souls, as consecrated to the Lord, and as to be disposed of by him in such a way as shall be most subservient to his glory. Then, if we live not to see the Temple of our God erected, we shall at least have the comfort of having provided materials for it: and at all events we shall secure to ourselves a rich reward; for God himself in our text assures us, that "they shall not be ashamed that wait for him."]

^z Isai. li. 9, 10.^a Isai. li. 17.^b Isai. lli. 1, 2.^c Phil. ii. 12, 13.

DCCCCLIV.

DESPONDING FEARS REMOVED.

Isai. xlix. 24—26. *Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? But thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee: and I will save thy children. And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh: and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.*

THE human mind is prone to extremes. Before we come into trials, we think them easy to be borne: but, when oppressed with them, we are apt to sink under them as an insupportable burthen. The Jews, previous to their captivity in Babylon, would never believe that such an event could take place: but, when they felt the galling yoke, they could not at all conceive that their Church should ever behold such glorious days as they were encouraged to expect. Certainly, humanly speaking, there was reason enough for them to despair: for they were in a state of the most abject slavery; the people by whom they were enslaved were the most powerful of any upon earth; and they had a consciousness, that they had sold themselves into that very state, by their iniquities. Hence they ask, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?" To this, however, God gives them a most gracious answer, assuring them, that he will interpose effectually in their behalf, and deliver them for his own name's sake.

But we must not confine the words to the Jewish Church. They may properly be applied to God's people in all ages; and be considered as representing, I. Their desponding fears—

Whilst men are living as without God in the world, they are for the most part unconscious of any danger; or at least they think that they are in no danger from which they may not easily be delivered. But as soon as they are awakened to a sense of their lost condition, they are apt to yield to the most discouraging apprehensions, on account of,

1. Their weakness—

[They see that they have been in a state of captivity all their days, having been *taken alive*, as it were, by the devil, and been led "captive by him at his will^a." And how shall they ever recover themselves from his snares? He is a god, even "the god of this world," who "ruleth in all the children of disobedience^b." Shall the prey be taken from one who is so mighty? As well might a lamb hope to deliver itself out of the jaws of a lion, as they to liberate themselves from that "roaring lion who is just ready to devour them^c." — — —]

^a 2 Tim. ii. 26. ἐξωρημένοι. ^b 2 Cor. iv. 4. Eph. ii. 2. ^c 1 Pet. v. 8.

2. Their desert—

[It is not their misfortune merely, but their fault, that they are in this sad bondage: they have “sold themselves to it by their iniquities^d,” as Esau bartered away his rights of primogeniture for a mess of pottage^e, so have they their liberty. They have chosen the gratifications of the flesh from the very first moment that they began to act: the indulgence of their corrupt inclinations was more to them than the favour of their God; so that by continual and wilful habits they have confirmed their natural propensities, and riveted the chains which Adam forged. Feeling themselves thus “sold under sin^f,” and become, as it were, the lawful property of Satan, they ask, “Shall the lawful captive be delivered?” The many acts of wilful transgression by which they have given him a right over them, appear an insurmountable bar to their deliverance, insomuch that the dry bones in Ezekiel’s vision scarcely appear in a more hopeless state than they^g. In this view of their just desert, they are tempted to say, “There is no hope^h.”]

These feelings however may well be assuaged by,

II. The gracious promises of God to them—

It is delightful to observe how directly God meets the wants and wishes of his people: the very language of their fears is here adopted by him, and made the vehicle of his promises to their souls. He engages that,

1. He himself will interpose for their deliverance—

[In a most wonderful way did he rescue his people from their captivity in Babylon. He raised up against that city an enemy; and, *in the precise way that he had foretold*, delivered it into his hands, even into the hands of Cyrus, whom he had specified by name above two hundred years before he existed in the world; and by him he dealt to the Babylonians that measure which they had before meted to his peopleⁱ, “feeding them with their own flesh, and making them drunk with their own blood.” And thus “will he bruise Satan also under his people’s feet^k.” Strong as Satan is, God has raised up against him one stronger than he, who has overcome him, and taken from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and utterly spoiled him^l. The Lord Jesus “came on purpose to destroy the works of the devil^m,” and he did destroy them. “Upon the cross he triumphed over him openlyⁿ,” and “by his own

^d Isai. l. 1.^e Heb. xii. 16.^f Rom. vii. 14.^g Ezek. xxxvii. 11.^h Jer. ii. 25.ⁱ See Jer. xxxi. especially ver. 35, 36, 49, 56.^k Rom. xvi. 20.^l Luke xi. 21, 22.^m 1 John iii. 8.ⁿ Col. ii. 15.

death utterly destroyed him," "and delivered from his power millions whom he had held in the most cruel bondage^o." In his resurrection and ascension "he led captive," as it were at his chariot wheels, this malignant foe^p; and has left his people nothing but to triumph over a vanquished enemy^q.

Here then is God's gracious answer to his people's fears. Are you asking, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? Yes, the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with them that contend with thee, and I will save thy children." What more than this can any soul desire? for, is not God able to deliver? or will he falsify his word? "Hath he said, and will he not do it? hath he spoken, and will he not make it good?"

But he further promises, that,]

2. He will glorify himself in their salvation—

[The deliverance of his people from Babylon, and their restoration to their own land, was an event that excited the astonishment of all the surrounding nations: "They saw, and could not but acknowledge, that he was their Saviour and Redeemer, even the Mighty One of Jacob." His own glory also will he display in the deliverance of his desponding people, as soon as ever they simply and believingly commit their cause to him. In fact, there is not in the whole universe a more striking monument of God's power than a redeemed soul. "He is a new creation^r." And, if it be said, "He is still weak;" true, he is so: but he is "a worm threshing the mountains^s;" and "God's strength shall be perfected in his weakness^t," and shall carry him on, though in the midst of the most potent enemies, "from strength to strength, till he shall finally appear before his God in Zion^u." To whatever circumstances he may be reduced by the assaults of men or devils, the Lord Jesus Christ will make them only a more conspicuous occasion for the display of "his own grace, which shall surely be sufficient" for all who trust in it, and shall constrain even their enemies themselves to acknowledge that the power which supports them is divine^x.]

Here then we SEE,

1. What extremes we are to avoid—

[In the concerns of our souls, we should stand at an equal distance from presumption and despondency. It surely can

^o Heb. ii. 14, 15.

^p Eph. iv. 8.

^q John xvi. 11.

^r 2 Cor. v. 17. Eph. ii. 10.

^s Isai. xli. 14—16.

^t 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^u Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

^x Dan. iii. 28. and vi. 25—27.

never be right for persons, corrupt as we are, to presume upon salvation, as though it were a blessing easy to be attained. We are in a state of bondage to sin and Satan — — (To this our whole lives bear witness.) The power of our adversary is such as no human being has within himself an ability to withstand — — — (His victory over our first parents in Paradise is proof enough of this.) Nor, considering how willing servants we have been to the destroyer, have we any just cause to expect the interposition of Jehovah in our behalf. Are we then to be secure and careless, as if we were in no danger? If “the righteous *scarcely* be saved,” shall we be as much at our ease, as if no effort were necessary to counteract the designs of Satan, and to rescue ourselves from his dominion? No verily: we must “not be high-minded, but fear.”

On the other hand, shall we, because of these difficulties and dangers, give way to a desponding frame? Shall we forget that there is a Saviour, who is both able and willing to deliver us? Justly does God reprove such folly and ingratitude: “Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding^y.” To entertain such thoughts, is greatly to dishonour God, whose tenderness and fidelity infinitely exceed all that ever existed in a mother’s bosom towards her infant offspring^z. Whatever therefore be our difficulties or our dangers, we should confide in Him who has undertaken for us that “we shall take those captive whose captives we were, and shall rule over our oppressors^a.”]

2. What is that happy medium which it becomes us to observe—

[The proper medium is, not to lessen either our fears or our hopes; but to call them forth into united and simultaneous exercise. Instead of attempting to lessen our sense of danger, it is desirable to have it augmented a hundred-fold: because then we shall feel the deeper need of God’s help, and be the more earnest in our prayers to him for it. So again, instead of lowering our expectations from God, we should endeavour to have them also greatly enlarged; because we shall then honour him the more, and go forth with tenfold energy to fight the good fight of faith. This is that union, which, whilst it humbles the sinner, will exalt the Saviour, and lead us, like the heavenly hosts, to fall on our faces before him, at the very time that we are glorying in his salvation^b. This is a point which is never

^y Isai. xl. 27, 28. ^z ver. 14—16. ^a Isai. xiv. 2. ^b Rev. v. 8.

fully understood, but by experience. Those who have never known it by experience, are ready to imagine, that a deep sense of guilt and helplessness will produce discouragement; and that an assured confidence in God will foster pride. But, if both be combined, as they ought to be, in our hearts, we shall possess that most desirable of all attainments, a childlike spirit^c. Nothing servile will remain. "The fear that has torment will be swallowed up in love^d," whilst that which flows from love will be in full activity. We shall rejoice evermore in the God of our salvation; but shall "rejoice with trembling^e;" not "boasting as if we had put off our armour," but girding it upon us for fresh encounters, till we have accomplished our warfare, and are crowned with everlasting victory.]

^c Mark x. 15.

^d 1 John iv. 18.

^e Ps. ii. 11.

DCCCCLV.

MESSIAH'S SUFFERINGS AND SUPPORT.

Isai. l. 5—9. *The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.*

IN considering the prophecies, we often find, that the mystical or prophetic sense is in reality the most literal; and that on some occasions, however the prophets may appear to speak of themselves, their words have little, if any, reference to themselves, and must be understood in reference to the Messiah alone. This is particularly observable in the passage before us. We may indeed suppose the prophet very remotely to speak of his own ministry, and to hint at his own trials and consolations: but it is obvious, that the expressions cannot with any propriety be applied in their stricter sense to any but the Messiah, in whom they were most literally fulfilled. The prophet Isaiah, it is true, was more fully instructed in divine truth

than any other of the prophets ; and he abounds more in consolatory promises to the weary and heavy-laden^a : but still we are constrained to pass him over, as having no sufficient ground to be noticed in the words before us ; and we must fix our attention conclusively on the Messiah, of whom they speak. We notice in them,

I. His sufferings—

These were indeed both great and various—

[Not to enter into the consideration of them at large, we shall notice only those which are here brought to our view.

“He gave his back to the smiters.” Scourging was no part of the punishment of those who were crucified. The thieves who were crucified with our Lord, were not scourged : and *he* was scourged *in order to prevent* his crucifixion^b. But a great variety of things which had no necessary connexion with each other, yea, and some which could not, except by a miraculous interposition, be combined together, were to meet in him : though therefore he was to be crucified, (which yet was not a Jewish, but a Roman punishment,) he was also to be scourged : and most cruelly, as another prophecy declares, was this punishment inflicted on him, “the plowers plowing upon his back, and making long furrows there^c.”

“He gave his cheeks also to them that plucked off the hair.” When the ambassadors of David were, by the command of the king of Ammon, deprived of half their beards, they considered it as so great an indignity, that they were quite ashamed ; and they were ordered to tarry at Jericho till their beards were grown^d. But the indignity offered to our Lord was united with much cruelty : for they blindfolded him, and smote him with their hands, and plucked off the hair from his face, and insultingly asked, “Prophecy, thou Christ ; Who is it that smote thee^e ?”

But besides the scourging, and plucking off his hair, we are told, They spat in his face ; “He hid not his face from shame and spitting.” Now in Eastern countries it is deemed an insult even to spit upon the ground in the presence of another : what then must it be to spit in his face ? If a person would be so degraded by it as to be rendered fit to be excluded from the camp of Israel^f, what an inconceivable humiliation was it to the Son of God to be so treated ! Yet thus he was treated, both in the palace of the high priest, and in Pilate’s judgment-hall.

^a ver. 4.

^b John xix. 1, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 15.

^c Ps. cxxix. 3.

^d 2 Sam. x. 4, 5.

^e Luke xxii. 63, 64.

^f Numb. xii. 14.

and that too by the lowest of the populace. How amazing it is, that, when Uzzah had been struck dead upon the spot for only touching the ark, which was a symbol of the Deity, such daring offenders as these, who so insulted the incarnate Deity himself, should escape, as it were, with impunity! But such were the sufferings which, as our Surety, Jesus was ordained to bear; and they all came upon him in due season.]

But he willingly undertook to sustain them all—

[Because in the verse preceding our text the “wakening of his ear” is mentioned, it is generally supposed that the expression of “opening his ear” is of exactly the same import. But we apprehend that the former expression refers to his *preparation* for his great office, and the latter to *the engagement which he made* to sustain and execute it. In this view there is a peculiar importance in it, especially as introducing the account of all his sufferings; and it is exactly parallel to a passage in the Psalms, where the same subject is treated of^g. David, beyond a doubt, refers to the appointment of God, that the slave, who, instead of claiming his liberty at the sabbatic year, should choose to continue in his master’s service, should have his ear bored to the door-post with an awl by his master, and should never afterwards be free. Thus our blessed Lord undertook to execute all that was necessary for our redemption; and submitted, as it were, to have “his ear opened,” in token that he would never recede from his engagements. Accordingly we find, that, in the most trying circumstances, he “never turned back;” but, on the contrary, when the time for enduring them was arrived, “he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem^h.” It is true, he prayed for the removal of the bitter cup, if men could possibly be saved without his drinking it: but at the same time he submitted to drink it, saying, “Not my will, but thine, be doneⁱ.” And again, when so oppressed in spirit that he knew not what to do, he said, “And now, Father, what shall I say? Save me from this hour? No: for this cause came I unto this hour: Father, glorify thy name^k.” At the time of his apprehension in the garden, he proved, by striking all his enemies to the ground with a word, that he could, if he chose, deliver himself from them: but he then meekly gave himself up into their hands, requiring only the peaceful dismissal of his servants^l. Thus manifestly did he shew that all his sufferings were voluntary, and that he endured them all in *obedience* to his Father’s will^m.]

^g Compare Ps. xl. 6—8. and Heb. x. 5—7. with Exod. xxi. 6.

^h Luke ix. 51.

ⁱ Matt. xxvi. 39.

^k John xii. 27, 28.

^l John xviii. 4—8.

^m Phil. ii. 8.

But in this same prophecy we have occasion to notice,

II. His supports—

In the whole of his Mediatorial work he acted as the servant of the Fatherⁿ; in whom he confided, and by whom he was assured of,

1. Effectual succour—

[The Father had promised to uphold him under all his sufferings^o — — — and on this promise he relied. Behold, how repeatedly, and with what assurance he asserts, “The Lord God will help me!” and with what triumph he defies his bitterest enemies; “Who will contend with me? let us stand together: Who is mine adversary? let him come near to me:” “I fear none of their accusations; for “He is near that justifieth me.” I dread not any sentence of theirs; for I know that they cannot finally prevail against me; “I know that I shall not be ashamed or confounded:” My “strength shall be according to my day;” and therefore, “I set my face as a flint” against all the powers both of earth and hell. Yes, this assurance comforted and strengthened him, under all his trials; “I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.” Hence arose that calmness and composure which so astonished Pilate: “How is it that thou wilt not answer me a word: knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and power to release thee?” No, says our Lord; “thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.”]

2. A triumphant issue—

[Already did he see his enemies vanquished, even when they supposed themselves to have triumphed over him: he saw that in every conflict he should be victorious: and that even his deepest humiliations should be attended with unquestionable demonstrations of his righteous character. In the midst of his trial, his very Judge was constrained to proclaim his innocence: and, whilst he yet hanged upon the cross, both heaven and earth bare testimony to him as a suffering God. At the appointed season, after his dissolution, he was “proved to be the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead.” His ascension also to the right hand of God in the presence of his disciples, and his sending down the Holy Ghost to testify of him, effectually removed the scandal of his cross, and proved him to be the true Messiah, the Saviour of

ⁿ Isai. xlix. 3. John xiv. 31.

^o Isai. xlii. 1, 6. and at large: Ps. lxxxix. 19—29.

^p Ps. xvi. 8.

the world. All this he foresaw; and the foresight of it enabled him to sustain the accumulated load of all his sufferings. He foresaw that his enemies would all “wax old as a garment, and that the very moth should eat them up;” whilst he and his cause should live for ever. And what now is become of the chief priests and elders, or of Pilate his judge? Yea, what is become of the Jewish nation itself, and of the whole Roman empire? They are all vanished: but “Christ liveth, and is alive for evermore;” and his kingdom is established in the world, and shall shortly be extended over the face of the whole earth. The prospect of this, I say, supported our adorable Emmanuel through all his sufferings; as an inspired Apostle also has informed us: it was “for the joy that was set before him,” of ransoming and saving a ruined world, “he endured the cross, and despised the shame;” and “he is now set down on the right hand of the throne of God^q.”]

Let us now pause, and CONTEMPLATE this holy sufferer,

1. As the predicted Saviour of the world—

[What was there in the whole book of prophecy which he did not fulfil? However contradictory in appearance the predictions were, every, the minutest of them, has been accomplished in him. He did not give up the ghost till he could say, in reference to them all, “It is finished.” The particulars mentioned in our text we see recorded in the Gospels: we see also the steadfastness with which he pursued his course, and the complete triumph of his cause in the world. Let us look to him then as the appointed Saviour: let us assure ourselves that he is able to save us to the uttermost. Let our confidence be in him, as his was in his Father: “let us live by him, as he lived by his Father:” and let us not doubt, but that, through the merit of his blood and the efficacy of his grace, we shall triumph even as he has triumphed, and be partakers of his kingdom and glory for evermore.]

2. As the great pattern of all holy obedience—

[In the whole of his life, and especially in his sufferings, he was intended to be a pattern and example to us^r. What if we be not treated precisely as he was, in scourging, and smiting, and spitting, we may be assured that we shall in some respect or other have both shame and suffering to endure for him. All his followers are, and must be, cross-bearers: “if men called the Master Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household.” Let us therefore “arm ourselves with the mind that was in him^s:” and especially let us maintain the

^q Heb. xii. 2.

^r 1 Pet. ii. 21. Heb. xii. 3.

^s 1 Pet. iv. 1.

same holy confidence in our God. This is assuredly both our duty and our privilege[†]; and we may comfort ourselves with this reflection, that, “if we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified together.”]

[†] Rom. viii. 33—39. Mark the peculiar correspondence of this passage with the text, both in spirit and expression.

DCCCCLVI.

A WORD IN SEASON.

Isai. l. 10, 11. *Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow.*

OUR blessed Lord was thoroughly furnished for the great work he had undertaken: he had “the tongue of the learned to speak a word in season” to every character. In the days of his flesh he encouraged the weary and heavy-laden with most affectionate invitations: but against the proud and persecuting Pharisees he denounced the heaviest woes. Thus also he did in the passage before us. It is in his name that the prophet speaks: it was he who “gave his back to the smiters,” and encountered all his enemies with a full assurance of final success: and he it is who, in the text, proclaims,

I. Comfort to the desponding—

There are some of God's people, who, notwithstanding their integrity, walk in a disconsolate and desponding frame—

[For the most part, the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness and peace; though there may be found some exceptions to this general rule. Not but that *real* and *unmixed* religion must of necessity make men happy: but there are some, whose views of divine truth are clouded, whose souls are harassed with the temptations of Satan, and who are at the same time too much under the influence of unbelief, who therefore, as might well be expected, are not happy; notwithstanding they truly “fear God, and conscientiously obey his

voice, they are in darkness and have no light;" at least, their hope is so faint and glimmering, that it scarcely affords them any support at all. If we were not able to assign any reason for the divine conduct in this particular, it would be quite sufficient for us to know, that God never suffers his people to be "in heaviness through manifold temptations," except when he sees some peculiar "necessity" for such a dispensation towards them^a.]

But to them is directed the most encouraging advice—

[Let not such persons say, "The Lord hath forsaken and forgotten me^b:" let them not conclude, that because their hemisphere is dark, it shall never be light; (for "light is sown for the righteous^c," though it may not instantly spring up) but "let them trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon their God." The name of the Lord is a strong tower, whither they may run, and in which they may find safety^d. By "the name of the Lord" we may understand all by which he has revealed himself to man, and especially that adorable Saviour "in whom his name is," and "in whom all his promises are yea and amen:" in him let them trust as a reconciled God and Father: yes, under the most distressing circumstances let them "encourage themselves in the Lord *their* God^e:" and if *he* appear to frown, still let them say with Job, Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him^f. And whenever disquieting thoughts arise, let them chide their unbelief, as David did^g; and determine, if they perish, to perish at the foot of the cross, pleading for mercy in the name of Jesus.]

To persons, however, of a different description, the Lord changes his voice; and speaks,

II. Terror to the secure—

While some are disquieted without a cause, there are others causelessly secure—

[To "kindle a fire and compass ourselves with its sparks" seems a natural and obvious expression for seeking our own ease and pleasure: and this may be done, either by self-pleasing endeavours to "establish a righteousness of our own, instead of submitting to the righteousness of God;" or by giving up ourselves to worldly occupations and carnal enjoyments. Now they, who find all their satisfaction in one or other of these ways, are very numerous; while they who serve God in sincerity, but walk in darkness, are comparatively very

^a 1 Pet. i. 6. ^b Isai. xlix. 14. ^c Ps. xcvi. 11. ^d Prov. xviii. 10.

^e 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

^f Job xiii. 15. ^g Ps. xlii. 11.

few^h: and so persuaded are they, for the most part, of the happy issue of their conduct, that they will scarcely listen to any thing which may be spoken to undeceive them. But, how numerous or confident soever they may be, their state is widely different from what they apprehend.]

To them God addresses a most solemn warning—

[Sometimes, when the obstinacy of men renders them almost incorrigible, God speaks to them in a way of irony. *Here* he bids them go on in their own way, and get all the comfort they can; but warns them withal what doom they must assuredly expect at his hands. Precisely similar to this is his warning to the same description of persons in the book of Ecclesiastesⁱ—And how often is it awfully realized in a dying hour! When they are lying on a bed of “sickness, how much wrath and sorrow” are mixed in their cup^k! And, the very instant they depart out of the body, what “tribulation and anguish” seize hold upon them! Alas! who can conceive what it is to lie down in everlasting burnings? Yet thus shall their lamp be extinguished; and their sparks of created comfort be succeeded by a fire that shall never be quenched^l.]

We cannot CONCLUDE this subject better than by directing the attention of all to two important truths connected with it:

1. To *believe* God's word is our truest *wisdom*—

[What advice can be given to a disconsolate soul better than that administered in the text? We may “offer thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil: yea, we may give our first-born for our transgression, the fruit of our body for the sin of our soul;” but we can never attain comfort in any other way than by an humble trust in the promises of God: we must “even against hope, believe in hope^m,” our “joy and peace must come by believing.” Nor is there less folly in arguing against the threatenings of God, than in questioning his promises. If God say respecting those who rest in self-righteous observances, or carnal enjoyments, that they shall lie down in sorrow, our disbelief of it will not make void his word: it will come to pass, even if the whole creation should unite to oppose it. Though men therefore may account it folly to believe the word of God, let us remember, that it is our truest wisdom; and that without an humble affiance in it, we cannot be happy either in time or eternity.]

^h This is strongly intimated in the text, “*Who is, &c.?* Behold, all ye, &c.”

ⁱ Eccl. xi. 9.

^k Eccl. v. 17.

^l Job xviii. 5, 6.

^m Rom. iv. 18.

2. To obey God's word is our truest happiness—

[We cannot have a more unfavourable picture of religion, nor a more favourable view of a carnal state, than in the text: yet who would hesitate which state to prefer? Who would not rather be "altogether such as Paul," notwithstanding his chain, than be like Festus or Agrippa on their thronesⁿ? Who would not rather be in the destitute condition of Lazarus, and attain his end, than live as Dives for a little time, and then want a drop of water to cool his tongue^o? Yes, the most afflictive circumstances of a religious man are infinitely preferable, *all things considered*, to the most prosperous state which an ungodly man can enjoy: the one sows in tears to reap in joy; and the other sows the wind to reap the whirlwind^p. Let us then be persuaded that to serve God is to consult our truest happiness, and that *in* keeping his commandments there is great reward^q.]

ⁿ Acts xvi. 29.

^o Luke xvi. 19—24.

^p Hos. viii. 7.

^q Ps. xix. 11.

DCCCCLVII.

CONSOLATION FOR THE AFFLICTED.

Isai. li. 1—3. *Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him. For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places, and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord: joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.*

AN attention to the voice of God in his word would comfort us under all troubles, and keep us steadfast amidst all the vicissitudes of life. God, anxious for the welfare of his people, has just before exhorted them, when walking in darkness, to trust in him^a. He now bids them bear in mind his former mercies, and expect yet richer blessings at his hands, when the destined period of their captivity shall have elapsed. Thus did God provide comfort for them against the day of their calamity; and the same comfort is reserved for all his people in their seasons of darkness

^a Isai. l. 10.

or affliction. To obtain the consolation which the text is suited to convey, it will be proper to consider,

I. What God has done for us already—

The description given of God's people is sufficiently appropriate, and will distinguish them from all other people upon earth. They "seek" the favour of "the Lord," and "follow after" it with incessant care in the way of "righteousness." But,

They once had little prospect of ever attaining to the blessings they enjoy—

[The Jewish nation was to descend from Abraham; but the promised seed was not given him till, according to the course of nature, there was no probability that his family should be increased. There was *then* little reason to expect that that nation ever should exist. Thus the people of God may look back upon the time that they were lying as stones in a quarry, and as clay in a pit. How little prospect was there *then*, that they should ever form a part of God's spiritual building!" They were as blind, as stupid, as averse to God and holy exercises, as any people in the universe^b. If they "ran not to the same excess of riot" as others, they were restrained merely by the overruling providence of God, and not by any hatred of sin which they had more than others.]

Yet they are now "called and blessed" of the Lord—

[The descendants of Abraham rapidly increased, and in process of time formed a very numerous and powerful nation. Who that beheld them at their departure from Egypt would have imagined that, only four hundred years before, these two millions of people had no existence but in the loins of Abraham? And who, that sees a person now "following after righteousness," would imagine that he was once a determined enemy to God, and had a nature as corrupt as any of his fellow-creatures? Let the saints remember what they were, that they may see what "great things the Lord has done for them:" let them "walk softly all the days of their life" under a sense of their former guilt; and stand amazed at the goodness of their God, who has so distinguished them with his favour.]

Nor is this any thing more than an earnest of,

II. What he has engaged to do—

^b Rom. iii. 10—19. and viii. 7.

As the Church at large, so every individual member of it may be in very afflictive circumstances—

[The Jews were reduced to the greatest distress during their captivity in Babylon; and their once fertile country was become a wilderness; nor could they remember Zion but with deep sorrow and regret. Thus the people of God at this time may be brought into great tribulation. Through persecution or temptation their “sorrows may be enlarged,” and their joys be turned into pain and anguish.]

But God promises to interpose for them in the time of need—

[He repeatedly foretold that he would deliver his people from their Babylonish captivity; and restore them with joy and triumph to their own land. This was a faint representation of what he would do for the true seed of Abraham under the Christian dispensation. He will revive his people with spiritual consolations. He will make their hearts, which now seem barren, or productive only of thorns, to be “fruitful in every good word and work.” *Paradise* itself, before sin had deformed its beauty, was a just emblem of what the soul shall be when God returns to visit it. The harp hung upon the willows shall be strung anew; “joy and gladness” shall succeed to the effusions of sorrow, and the groans of contrition yield to “thanksgivings and the voice of melody.” Let but the afflicted soul tarry the Lord’s leisure, and it shall surely experience the wished-for deliverance.]

To encourage all to confide in this promise, let us consider,

III. In what respects the recollection of mercies received may strengthen our expectations of those that are promised—

Nothing could be more animating to the Jews in Babylon than the recollection of what God had done in raising so flourishing a tree from the dead stock of Sarah’s womb, and in continuing to water it for so many centuries, notwithstanding the bad fruit it had continued to produce. Nor can any thing be more consoling to us than a retrospective view of God’s dealings with us. In them we may behold,

1. His sovereign grace—

[In every thing relative to the raising of the Jewish nation God displayed his sovereignty. And may we not behold the

same in his choice of *us*? Why did he hew *us* out of the quarry, while such a mass of stone, equally fit for his purpose, was left behind? Why did he “form *us* into vessels of honour,” while so much of the very “same lump was left to form vessels of dishonour?” Who shall deny the fact that such a selection has been made? or “Who shall say unto God, What doest thou?” Shall any drooping saints then despond because of their unworthiness? Let them remember, that, as God never chose them for their superior worthiness, so he may still continue his favours towards them notwithstanding their unworthiness: his grace is still his own as much as ever; and, *if they do but lament their unworthiness and cast themselves on his mercy*, it shall still be glorified in their restoration and bliss.]

2. His almighty power—

[As the Omnipotence of God was manifest in producing such a nation from two, whose “bodies were as good as dead,” so is it no less visible in the “quickenings of those who are dead in sin,” and forming “an host of living saints from those who were like dry bones scattered over the face of the earth.” Can any then, who have been quickened by grace, doubt whether God be *able* to preserve or restore them? Can “any thing appear to them too hard for God?” Surely though their souls appear at present only like a desert or a wilderness, they need “not stagger at the promises of God;” but yet may entertain the hope that they may “blossom as the rose,” yea, that they shall “put off their sackcloth, and gird them with gladness.”]

3. His unchanging faithfulness—

[After God had promised to Abraham, he never would recede: though he delayed, he did not forget his promise: and even when constrained to punish his people, he did not cast them off. Not even at this time are they finally abandoned; but are preserved a distinct people, monuments of God’s faithfulness, and a seed for a future harvest. And is not every saint a distinguished monument of God’s faithfulness? Would any one stone of God’s building have withstood the shocks and tempests that have assaulted it, if God himself had not interposed to keep it fixed on the foundation? Would not every vessel of his sanctuary have been dashed in pieces times without number, if the potter himself had not averted the stroke, or hardened us to endure it? Where is there a saint who is not a wonder to himself, a spark kept alive in the midst of the ocean? Well then may the faithfulness we have already experienced confirm our hope, that God “will never leave us nor forsake us.” And well may the most disconsolate of God’s people wait, “knowing in whom they have believed,” and assuredly expecting the promised revival.]

APPLICATION—

Let us HEARKEN to the advice given us in the text:

1. Let us, both for our humiliation and comfort, review the dispensations of God's providence and grace towards us . . .

2. Let us, under our heaviest trials, look forward to the season when God's promises shall receive their final accomplishment . . .

DCCCCLVIII.

A DISSUASIVE FROM THE FEAR OF MAN.

Isai. li. 7, 8. *Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law: Fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings: for the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool; but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.*

OUR heavenly Father, anxious that we should attend to his word in every thing, uses various means to impress it on our minds: sometimes he issues his commands with authority, and enforces them with threatenings of his displeasure: at other times he exhorts with more than parental tenderness, and persuades us with the most encouraging considerations. Thus, in the chapter before us, he says no less than three times, “Hearken to me, O my people^a!” In that spirit we would now address you. It is in Jehovah's name that we speak, yea, and in his very place and stead^b: and we entreat you to listen with an obedient ear, whilst we guard you against one of the most dangerous snares in which Satan ever entangles the souls of men. We invite your attention then to the words of our text, and beg you to consider,

I. The fact here supposed—

The supposition does certainly at first sight appear strange—

^a ver. 1, 4, 7.

^b 2 Cor. v. 20.

[Had it been intimated, that persons professing religion and at the same time dishonouring it by their conduct, would be objects of reproach, it would have been nothing but what we might reasonably expect; because hypocrisy is more detestable than even the most flagrant vice: but that persons “in whose heart is God’s law,” and who consequently reverence and obey all the commandments of God, should be reviled and hated, seems almost incredible. We should be ready to think that such persons would rather be universally loved and honoured, not only because all occasion of blame is cut off from them, but because there is in them an assemblage of all that is virtuous and praise-worthy.]

But the fact supposed is common in all ages—

[The very first-born of the human race hated and murdered his own brother, for no other cause than his superior piety: and it was on similar grounds that Ishmael mocked and derided his brother Isaac. Our blessed Lord experienced similar treatment from the men of his day; and has taught all his followers to expect the same. After portraying the character of his people in a great variety of particulars, he adds, “Blessed are ye, when men shall hate and revile you^c.” We are ready to wonder that such an expression should be introduced in such a connexion; but a little observation will suffice to convince us that that addition was not made without reason.]

Nor is it difficult to account for this fact—

[*The natural man hates God^d*; and consequently hates his image, wherever it appears — — — Moreover, *men have established a false standard for judging*; viewing things only in reference to *this present life*. What wonder then if they account those to be fools and mad, who disregard the things of time and sense, and look only to the things that are invisible and eternal? But, in condemning the godly, *they are actuated also in no small degree by self-defence*. It is obvious, that, if the godly be right, the ungodly must be wrong: yea, if there be only a remote probability that the godly *may* be right, the ungodly *must* be wrong, because they do not pause to examine carefully into the truth or falsehood of their own opinions. Hence the ungodly decide at once, and load the godly with revilings and reproach, as the only, or, at least, the easiest way of justifying their own conduct.]

The existence of this fact being clearly ascertained, let us contemplate,

^c Matt. v. 3—11. and Luke vi. 20—23.

^d Rom. viii. 7.

II. The advice here given in reference to it— Here let us notice,

1. The advice itself—

[The human mind naturally shrinks back from revilings and reproach: and well it may, when any thing really disgraceful is imputed to us. Such a regard to the opinions of men, so far from being wrong, is truly amiable and praiseworthy; and a want of it would argue extreme degeneracy, and inveterate corruption. None but those who are hardened with pride, and insensible to shame, will ever presume to set public opinion at defiance. But where “the revilings and reproach” are wholly unmerited, and we have the testimony of our own consciences that we are “persecuted only for righteousness sake,” we may then discard all fear, and all concern about the ignominy to which we are exposed^e. In such a case we do well to “set our face as a flint against the whole world,” and even to glory in the reproaches that are cast upon us. Under such circumstances we do not hesitate to repeat the advice which God himself gives us in the text, “Fear not the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings.” We would not so entirely exclude all prudential considerations as to prescribe exactly the same line of conduct to all persons; because we can conceive many situations in which reserve and caution are expedient, with a view to greater ultimate good: but in all cases, and under all circumstances, the fear of man must be put away; and we must follow what we believe to be the true line of our duty, even though the whole world should combine to censure and condemn us.]

2. The considerations with which it is enforced—

[What is man, or what is his reproach, that we should be afraid of any thing that he can say? Let him carry his enmity to the uttermost, he can do no more than kill the body: our spiritual and eternal interests are wholly out of his reach^f: and, in a little time, the proudest persecutor will be as impotent as the worm he treads on: “the very moth shall eat him up like a garment.” What is become of those who, in different and distant ages, have set themselves against the Lord and his Christ? they are swept away, and “gone to their own place.” But the Gospel which they opposed, still survives and flourishes, and proves at this day as effectual for the salvation of men as ever. The doctrine of a crucified Saviour is still as precious as at any period of the world: it still avails to heal the wounds which sin has inflicted, and to fill with light and

^e This distinction is made by St. Peter. 1 Pet. iv. 14—16.

^f Luke xii. 4, 5.

peace and joy the souls of the weary and heavy-laden. And, whilst the Gospel itself continues unchanged, what is now the state of those who once suffered reproach for the Gospel's sake? Are they the less happy on account of what they once endured? or do they now regret that they exposed themselves to ignominy and contempt for the sake of Christ? No: their felicity has been inconceivably enhanced by every persecution they endured? and throughout all eternity will they rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for their Redeemer's sake^g.

What reason then have we to fear enemies who are so incapable of inflicting on us any serious injury, and over whom our triumph will be so speedy, so complete, so certain, so glorious? The smallest reflection on the eternal states of the oppressors and oppressed will surely reconcile us to any thing that we may be called to suffer in our way to heaven.]

Let us now ADD a word,

1. Of caution—

[Whilst we exhort all to despise reproach, we must entreat you so to walk, as not to *merit* it. If persons professing godliness act in any respect unworthy of their profession, they bring contempt, not on themselves only, but on religion itself; and the very "truth of God will be evil spoken of through their means." It is possible too to bring just reproach on ourselves, by indulging in needless singularities. Religion is a wise and sober thing; and is calculated to "make us perfect in every good good work." We would entreat you therefore to "cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against you," and to "walk wisely before God in a perfect way." If you profess to "know righteousness," let your whole conduct prove that the "law of God is in your heart." This is of such infinite importance, that we cannot forbear urging it upon you after the example of God himself; "Hearken to me, hearken to me, hearken to me, O my people!"]

2. Of encouragement—

[Though we are to *expect* nothing but revilings and reproach for our fidelity to God, it is possible that we may in reality be honoured for that very conduct, which, in appearance, has exposed us to shame: for there is something in a holy and consistent life which carries a secret conviction to the minds of our accusers, and tends not only to silence^h, but to win, themⁱ. And, though we can never hope that an unconverted man shall *love* us, we may hope that he shall "*be at*

^g See these different states described, Isai. lxvi. 5. and lxv. 13, 14.

^h 1 Pet. ii. 12, 15.

ⁱ 1 Pet. iii. 1.

peace with us^k," and even become a witness for us against those who yet load us with their reproaches^l. But, however this may be, man's judgment is but for *a day^m*; and then the Lord's time will come, and our righteousness will shine forth as the noon-dayⁿ. Be contented then to follow your Divine Master, and to bear your cross as he has done before you: and be assured, that "if you suffer with him, you shall also be glorified together^o."]]

^k Prov. xvi. 7.

^l Luke xxiii. 14, 15, 22.

^m See 1 Cor. iv. 3. The Greek.

ⁿ 1 Cor. iv. 5.

^o 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13. Rom. viii. 17.

DCCCCLIX.

THE CHURCH PLEADING WITH GOD.

Isai. li. 9, 10. *Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O arm of the Lord! awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?*

GOD delights in encouraging his people, when reduced to the lowest ebb of despondency. Hence, under the bitterest oppression, he assures them that the period shall soon arrive for the administering of consolation to their souls, and for the enlargement of the Church by a vast accession of Gentiles to her. And, to impress his assurances more strongly on their minds, he again and again repeats that most condescending and affectionate entreaty; "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness:" "hearken unto me, my people:" "hearken unto me, ye in whose heart is my Law^a." Of such addresses it becomes his people, under their heaviest distresses, to take advantage. As Benhadad, when captive to the king of Israel, and expecting nothing but death, charged his servants to observe with the utmost diligence whether any favourable expression dropped from the lips of Ahab, and to take immediate advantage of it^b; so should we, when we hear the offended Majesty of

^a ver. 1, 4, 7.

^b 1 Kings xx. 33.

Heaven addressing us in such terms of grace and mercy. But his ancient people, listening only to their own desponding fears, complained, as it were, of him, as if he had become regardless of their cries, and indifferent to their welfare. This was not well. Yet as, on the whole, their importunity was pleasing unto God, I shall consider the words before us,

I. As expressing the desires of God's ancient Church—

The Jewish Church are here represented as in a most disconsolate state, under the pressure of severe trials, and under the apprehension of yet more grievous oppressions. And they call on God, in the most urgent manner, to interpose for their deliverance.

The terms they use are not in themselves improper—

[Certainly, at first sight, it appears irreverent to speak of God as though he needed to be “awaked” from sleep. But this is a mere figure of speech; importing only a desire that he would, *after the example of former times*, exert his power in their behalf. David expresses the idea yet more fully, when he says, “Awake; *why sleepest thou*, O Lord? arise; cast us not off for ever. Wherefore hidest thou thy face; and *forgettest* our affliction and oppression?” What David meant by these strong expressions, appears from the first verse of that very psalm: “We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what thou didst in their days, in the times of old.” Bearing in mind God's wonders of old time, he was anxious to have them renewed at the period wherein he lived. “*Our* soul (like that of our forefathers) is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the earth: arise for *our* help, and redeem us for thy mercies' sake^d.”]

Nor was there any thing unbecoming in their pleas—

[In the language of Scripture, Egypt is often called “Rahab;” and Pharaoh is characterized as “a dragon^c.” Against these God has exerted his power to their utter destruction; whilst, for the effectual deliverance of his people, he had “dried the waters of the great deep, and made the depths of the sea a way for his ransomed to pass over.” A similar interposition they needed yet again in Babylon; as they do

^c Ps. xliv. 23, 24.

^d Ps. xliv. 1, 25, 26.

^e Ps. lxxxvii. 4. Ezek. xxix. 3.

also at this very hour. Hence they, both in Babylon and in their present dispersion, are represented as reminding God of his former mercies, and as urgently imploring at his hands a renewal of them. And, no doubt, a repetition of these mercies, or of deliverances equivalent to them, shall yet take place in their behalf: for it is expressly said, "The Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind will he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry-shod. And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left from Assyria, *like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt*†."]

But the text is chiefly worthy of observation,

•II. As affording a pattern for God's afflicted people in all ages—

Two things it clearly teaches us:

1. That we should bear in remembrance God's past mercies—

[The inspired writers are continually referring to the wonders wrought by Jehovah in behalf of his people in Egypt and in the wilderness: and God himself refers to them, as marking in a most extraordinary manner his power and grace, and as fitly illustrating his proper character: "Thus saith the Lord, who maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters." And should not *we* also bear those wonders in remembrance? Are they not shadows of that great redemption which God has wrought for us in the Son of his love, and which it is the privilege of every individual amongst us to experience in his own soul? Have not *we* been held under a bondage infinitely more oppressive than that of Egypt; a bondage to sin and Satan, death and hell? And have not we been delivered, not by *power* only, but by *price*, even the precious blood of God's only dear Son? Are not the wonders of the wilderness also the very same as are wrought for us in Christ; who is the true bread of heaven given for the sustenance of our souls, and the true rock also, from whence the waters of life are ever flowing for our refreshment?

Nay, more; should we not bear in mind, also, the mercies vouchsafed individually to ourselves—our temporal blessings; our conversion to God; our preservation from sin; our restoration from falls and backslidings; our peace; our hope; our consolations in the midst of trials? Methinks every one of us has within his own bosom a counterpart of all that God has

† Isai. xi. 15, 16.

ever done for the salvation of the world: and if we did but call to mind the mercies with which we have been daily loaded from our youth up to this present moment, we never should want memorials of God's love to us, or grounds for encouragement under the most afflictive dispensations.]

2. That we should make them the *grounds* and *measure* of our future expectations—

[I well know, that, strictly speaking, we have no *ground* of expectation, but from the promises of God. But, in a more lax sense, we may say, that his past mercies are *earnests* and *pledges* of future blessings. It is a legitimate inference which the Psalmist draws: "Thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living^g?" Yes; if we can say of God, "Thou hast delivered;" we may reasonably add, "In whom I trust that he will yet deliver^h."

But we may go further, and consider God's past mercies as *the measure* of our future expectations. It is in this particular view that the Church reminds him of the wonders he had wrought for them in Egypt and at the sea: and, with a special view to this, may we also recapitulate all the wonders of redeeming love. In truth, we have in this respect a great advantage over the Jewish Church: for *THEY might* need, yes, and *do* need, mercies fully equal to those which were wrought for their forefathers in Egypt: but *WE* never can need another Saviour to die for us, another Spirit to instruct us. God, if I may so say, has gone to the utmost possible extent of love and grace for us: and all that we can ever need to have done for us, in future, falls infinitely short of what he has already done: "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, *much more*, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his lifeⁱ." The blessings vouchsafed to Israel fell infinitely short of those which have been vouchsafed to us, even as shadows do of the substance which they represent. Yet, if we needed the sea to open us a passage, and the clouds to supply our daily food, and water to issue from a rock, we should account them great things to ask: but, after what we have received, nothing is great; not even heaven with all its glory: for "if God spared not his own Son, but delivered *HIM* up for us all, *how shall he not* with him also freely give us *all things*^k?"]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are humbled under a sense of sin—

^g Ps. lvi. 13.

ⁱ Rom. v. 10.

^h 2 Cor. i. 10.

^k Rom. viii. 32.

[It may be, your sins have been very great; and you are ready to account yourselves so unworthy, that it is scarcely to be hoped that God should ever have mercy upon you. But bear in mind the sovereignty he exercised in the call of Abraham. Was he not an idolater, in the midst of an idolatrous people¹? Yet did God choose him, and enter into covenant with him, and bless, in him and in his seed, all the nations of the earth. Why, then, may he not display his sovereignty in the exercise of love to you? Perhaps your sins have been, beyond measure, deep and multiplied. Still, did not Manasseh obtain mercy, after having set up idols in the very House of God, and “made the streets of Jerusalem to run down with the blood of innocents^m?” But your hearts, you will say, have raged with enmity against God and his Christ. So it was with Paul, who yet obtained mercy, whilst in the very act of persecuting the Lord’s people; and “*therefore* obtained mercy, that in him Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, *for a pattern* to them that should hereafter believe on him to life everlastingⁿ.” Perhaps you will say, that your state is the more hopeless, because you have backslidden from God, and so fallen as to make “the very name of God to be blasphemed in the world.” Well; supposing even this to be the case, you still may go unto God, and say, “Art thou not He that shewed mercy to an adulterous, a murderous, a hardened and obdurate David^o?” Be your state as desperate as it may, yet see whether you cannot find in the divine records some interpositions of the Deity fully adequate to your wants, and commensurate with your necessities? Take these; spread them before God in prayer: plead them before him; and implore at his hands a similar effort in your own behalf. Mistake me not, however: imagine not, for a moment, that I say these things to encourage you in sin: God forbid! No: but I say them to keep you from despair: and what the Jewish Church are represented as doing under their extremities, *that* I recommend every sinner in the universe to do: Call to mind God’s wonders of old time; and let them be *the ground of your hopes, and the measure of your expectations.*]

2. Those who are bowed down under affliction—

[In *your* case, more especially, may the Jewish Church be proposed for an example. You well remember how the whole nation cried out at the sight of Pharaoh and his hosts, and how utterly they despaired of help. But their extremity was the very season when God interposed for their effectual deliverance,

¹ Josh. xxiv. 2, 3.

^m 2 Kings xxi. 1—7, 16. with 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11—13.

ⁿ 1 Tim. i. 16.

^o 2 Sam. xii. 13.

making the very depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over. To you, then, he is now saying, "Come down into the very depths of the sea:" it is *there* that you shall see my wonders in your behalf. Be not frightened, "though the waves thereof roar:" for "when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and when through the foaming surge, it shall not overflow thee^p:" nay, they shall be thy very safeguard from the foe that pursues thee; and shall be the destruction of those that would destroy thy soul. Realize in your minds, Brethren, this consolatory truth, that "tribulation is the way to the kingdom^q;" and then, whatever you may suffer, you will give thanks to God, who, not in anger, but "in faithfulness, has caused you to be afflicted^r."]

3. Those who despond in relation to the Church.

[The Jews at this day appear to many to be in so desperate a state, as to render any efforts in their behalf vain and nugatory. But are they in a more hopeless condition than they were in Egypt or in Babylon? or is God less able to deliver now, than he was in the days of old? Surely not: "His hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor his ear heavy, that it cannot hear^s." If there were only amongst us an holy importunity, crying, "Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord!" verily, his arm should be revealed; and he would work, as in the days of old. Be it so; there are seas of difficulty in our way: but cannot "He who cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon, and dried up the sea for his people," interpose now with equal effect, and glorify himself in our salvation? He can; he will: he has spoken it; and his word shall stand. Yes; "the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away^t" — — —]

^p Isai. xliii. 2. ^q Acts xiv. 22. ^r Ps. cxix. 75. ^s Isai. lix. 1.

^t ver. 11. If this were a subject for *the Conversion of the Jews*, this thought should be amplified, and confirmed by other passages of Holy Writ.

DCCCCCLX.

DESPONDENCY REPROVED.

Isai. lii. 1—3. *Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake thyself from the dust;*

arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion. For thus saith the Lord, Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money.

NOTHING is more common, than for men to cast reflections upon God, when the fault is wholly in themselves. The ungodly world, when urged to devote themselves to God, agreeably to the divine commands, will allege, that those commands are themselves unreasonable, because it is not in their power to obey them. Thus they cast the blame, not on themselves, for the inveteracy of their evil habits and the alienation of their hearts from God, but upon God himself, as requiring so much at their hands. It were well if this disposition were not found also amongst persons professing godliness. But the godly themselves, under the power of temptation, are apt to complain of God, as unwilling to hear their prayer, and to deliver them from their troubles; when, in fact, they neglect to use the means through which alone they are authorized to expect success. This the Jewish Church had done; saying, in a querulous tone, to God, “Awake, awake; put on strength, O arm of the Lord!” But the Lord retorts upon them the accusation, and says, “Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion!” that is, ‘Do not stand complaining of me, as if I were inattentive to your welfare; but exert the powers which ye have; and, in the diligent use of them, expect my promised blessing.’

The words thus explained will give me a just occasion to observe,

I. That we should exert ourselves, as if all depended on our own efforts—

To this the Jews were called, in the midst of all their discouragements—

[In the Babylonish captivity, despondency prevailed amongst them, as if it were not possible for them ever to be delivered. But it became them, like Daniel, to study the prophecies relating to their captivity; and, in a state of holy preparation, confidently to expect deliverance at God’s appointed time. “*Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord;*

for ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rere-ward^a."

The promise, that "there should no more come into Jerusalem the uncircumcised and the unclean," evidently directs our minds to a period yet future: for not only was Jerusalem invaded after their return from Babylon, but the very worship of the temple was suspended by Antiochus: their city also, and temple, and polity, were subsequently destroyed by the Romans; and their whole nation have now remained above seventeen hundred years in a state of utter desolation and dispersion. But they must not on that account despond. The prophecies relating to their future restoration shall surely be fulfilled: and it becomes them all to be in a state of holy expectation; just as Abraham was, when, at the distance of two thousand years, "he saw the day of Christ, and rejoiced." This gives us what I apprehend to be the true view of our text: God directs his complaining people to anticipate with joy that blissful period: "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; (even as a bride expecting the speedy arrival of the bridegroom:) for there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean: (after their restoration, no Chaldean, or other foe, shall ever overwhelm them more.) Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion."

To this also every desponding saint is called—

[There is no condition that can justify a desponding inactivity. The word of God is full of exceeding great and precious promises, which shall all be fulfilled in their season, to those who rely upon them. These we should contemplate: we should treasure them up in our minds: we should plead them before God in prayer: we should expect assuredly the fulfilment of them: however long or dark our night may be, we should look with confidence for the returning light of day: we should know, that "the goings forth of Jehovah" for the salvation of his people "are prepared as the morning;" and that he will appear at the appointed hour. However frequently vanquished by our spiritual foes, we should return to the charge, "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." We should never, for a moment, suffer the thought of our weakness to discourage us: we should rather make it a reason for exertion, in the full confidence, that "when we are weak, then are we strong;" and that "God will perfect his strength in our weakness." This is the very instruction which an

^a ver. 11, 12.

inspired Apostle gives us: "Work out," says he, "your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure^b." The man with the withered hand is a fit example for us to follow. The command given him by our Lord was, "Stretch forth thine hand." He did not indolently reply, 'I cannot;' but immediately made an effort to comply; and, in the attempt, he was strengthened to perform the deed^c. So would it be with us, if, in obedience to God's word, and in dependence on his grace, we addressed ourselves to the duties which we have to perform: "our light would soon rise in obscurity, and our darkness be as the noon-day." The very exhibition of a lamp from a broken pitcher, if done in faith, should be sufficient to overcome the strongest foe^d.]

From God's reply to his complaining people we learn,

II. That we should expect every thing from God, as if there were no need of personal exertions—

Such was the instruction given to the Jews—

[Captives are wont to be redeemed with money. But what prospect had the Jews of being liberated from captivity on such terms as these? They were despoiled of every thing; and had no friend to interpose in their behalf, and to pay a ransom for them. But, says God, "Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money." Look back, and see, What did ye ever gain by all the transgressions by which ye provoked me to cast you off? Know then, that as ye never *received* any thing in return for your souls, so shall ye never be called upon to *give* any thing for the liberation of them. This was specifically promised; and the very person who should liberate them was proclaimed by name three hundred years before any such person existed in the world^e: and it was fulfilled at the time predicted; yea, so literally fulfilled, that not only were they permitted to return to their native land, but means were afforded them for rebuilding their city and temple; and the vessels which had been taken away by the Chaldean monarch, were restored to them, for the service of the sanctuary, and the worship of their God^f.

In what precise manner their future restoration shall be accomplished, we do not exactly know: but sure we are, that it shall "not be by price or reward" given to the various potentates who rule over them: no; it shall be in a way not less

^b Phil. ii. 12, 13.

^c Matt. xii. 13.

^d Judg. vii. 16—21.

^e Isai. xlv. 28. and xlv. 13.

^f 2 Chron. xxxvi. 22, 23. and Ezra i. 2—11.

wonderful than their deliverance from Egypt or from Babylon; a way that shall leave no doubt, upon the minds of any, that the hand of the Lord hath done it^g. To this the whole nation may look forward with confidence; for “the mountains shall depart,” saith God, “and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee; neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee.”]

Such, too, is the lesson that must be learned by us—

[“We have sold ourselves for nought.” I will appeal to every one amongst you; What have you ever gained by sin? What has the world ever done for you? What have you ever found in it, but “vanity and vexation of spirit?” Truly it may be said of you also, that you have never *received* any thing in return for your souls. To you also may it be said, that neither are ye called to *give* any thing for their redemption. The price has been already paid, even “the precious blood of God’s only dear Son, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot^h,” and all that remains for you is, to receive freely what your God so freely bestowsⁱ. The proclamation has gone forth: it is already issued from the court of heaven: the jubilee-trumpet has announced it long: “Shake yourselves from the dust: loose yourselves from the bands of your necks, ye captive daughters of Zion:” return ye, every one, from your sore bondage, and take possession of your forfeited inheritance: receive all the blessings of salvation “freely, without money, and without price^k.” Sit not, any of you, in a desponding frame, crying, “Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord!” but hear your God saying to you, “Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and unclean.” Complete deliverance is at hand, for all that truly desire it; for all that are willing to receive it. Do not imagine that it is any mark of humility to *doubt*: it is no virtue in you; but rather a grievous insult to your God. So God himself represents it: “Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. *He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.* Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with

^g ver. 6. ^h 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. ⁱ Rom. iii. 24. ^k Isai. lv. 1.

wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint¹." As for seeking to justify your despondency by any peculiarities in your state, it is all folly; it is all impiety; it is all a forgetfulness of God. "Shall the prey be taken from the *mighty*, or the *lawful* captive delivered? Yes: thus saith the Lord; even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for *I* will contend with him that contendeth with thee; and *I* will save thy children^m." Fear not, then, thou desponding soul; but commit thy cause to God: and know assuredly, that the more simple thine affiance is in him, and the more confident thine expectation of his effectual help, the more speedy and manifest shall be his interpositions in thy behalf. Only believe in him; and he will glorify himself in thy complete and everlasting deliverance.]

¹ Isai. xl. 27—31.

^m Isai. xlix. 24, 25.

DCCCCLXI.

THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL.

Isai. lii. 7. *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!*

IN order to understand the prophetic writings, we must always bear in mind that they have a spiritual or mystical sense, as well as a plain and literal one. The words before us, in their primary meaning, evidently refer to the joy with which the proclamation of Cyrus, when he permitted the captive Jews to return from Babylon to their native country, would be received. But they certainly relate also to the deliverance announced to us under the Gospel-dispensation; for it is in this view that they are quoted by the Apostle Paul^a. We shall take occasion from them to shew,
I. What the Gospel is—

It is described with sufficient accuracy in the text: it is,

1. A proclamation of "peace and salvation" to man—

^a Rom. x. 15.

[The Gospel supposes men to have offended God, and to be obnoxious to his everlasting displeasure. It further supposes that they have no way of conciliating the Divine favour, or of warding off the stroke of his indignation. Coming to men in this helpless and hopeless state, it publisheth tidings of peace and salvation: it represents sin as expiated by the atoning blood of Jesus; and God as reconciled to all who will trust in his meritorious and all-prevailing sacrifice. This is the view which St. Paul himself gives us of the Gospel; in preaching of which Gospel ministers resemble the messengers sent to Babylon, who had nothing to do but to proclaim a full and free deliverance to the wretched captives^b.]

2. A declaration of Christ's power and grace—

[The Chaldeans, who so grievously oppressed their Jewish captives, may justly represent to us the bitter and tyrannical dominion of sin and Satan: and Cyrus, who, without fee or reward, liberated them from their bondage, may be considered as the agent and representative of the Deity. As therefore the messengers would not fail to remind the Jews, that Cyrus, the one author of their happiness, would continue to them his protection and favour while they maintained their allegiance to him; so, in preaching the Gospel, we are to declare, that Christ, to whom we owe the beginnings of our liberty, will complete our deliverance, and continue to us all the tokens of his love, provided we yield him, as we are in duty bound, a willing and unreserved obedience. Thus did Christ himself preach the Gospel, saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand^c.]

If we view the Gospel in this light, we shall see immediately,

II. That it is a ground of joy—

By a beautiful figure, the very steps of the messenger hastening over the distant mountains are represented as inspiring us with joy. That the Gospel itself is a source of joy, appears in that,

1. It has been considered so from the first moment of its promulgation—

[Abraham, two thousand years before its promulgation, rejoiced exceedingly in a distant prospect of it^d. At the birth of Jesus, our deliverer, a host of angels congratulated the world, saying, "Behold, we bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born a

^b 2 Cor. v. 18—20.

^c Compare Mark i. 14, 15. with Matt. iv. 17.

^d John viii. 56.

Saviour, which is Christ the Lord^e." As soon as ever the full effects of the Gospel came to be experienced, the converts, filled with every malignant temper just before, were filled with joy, and "ate their bread with gladness and singleness of heart, blessing and praising God^f." No sooner was the Gospel preached in Samaria, than "there was great joy in that city:" and, the instant that the eunuch had embraced it, "he went on his way rejoicing^g." Thus it is at this day a healing balm and a reviving cordial to all who understand and receive it.]

2. It is in itself well calculated to create joy in our hearts—

[Let but its blessings be felt, and it will be impossible not to rejoice. Did the Jews exult at a deliverance from a cruel yoke, and a restoration to their native country? How much more must a sinner rejoice at his deliverance from death and hell, and his restoration to the forfeited inheritance of heaven! The transports of joy manifested by the cripple whom Peter and John had healed, were the natural effusions of a grateful heart: we should have wondered if he had not so expressed the feelings of his soul^h: but he had received no benefit in comparison of that which the believer enjoys when he first embraces the Gospel of Christ. Hence our prophet represents the Gospel as invariably producing such sensations as the husbandman feels when bringing home the fruits of the field, or the soldier when dividing the spoils of victoryⁱ.]

3. It is, and ever will be, the one subject of thanksgiving in the realms of glory—

[The glorified saints never have their attention diverted from it for one single moment: day and night are they singing to him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood^k. And though the angels are less interested in this subject, because they never needed redeeming grace, yet do they join the general chorus, ascribing honour and glory to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever. Nor will they ever be weary of this subject; such an inexhaustible fund is it of light, and happiness, and glory.]

INFER—

1. How strange is it that the Gospel should be treated with indifference!

[That it is so treated, needs no proof: but how amazing that it should ever be slighted by those to whom it is sent! that condemned criminals should disregard the offers of

^e Luke ii. 10, 11.

^f Acts ii. 46, 47.

^g Acts viii. 8, 39.

^h Acts iii. 8.

ⁱ Isai. ix. 3, 6.

^k Rev. i. 5, 6.

pardon sent them by their prince! O that there might be no more occasion for that complaint, "Who hath believed our report?" Let the very feet of the messengers who bring the tidings be henceforth beautiful in our eyes.]

2. Of what importance is it to distinguish between mere morality, and the Gospel of Christ!

[Lectures upon honesty would administer but little comfort to a person about to be executed for breaking the laws of his country: nor can mere discourses on morality administer much comfort to a self-condemning sinner: and if he mistake such discourses for the Gospel, he is fatally deceived. The Gospel is a full and free offer of salvation through the blood of Christ: and this is glad tidings indeed; like "rivers of water in a dry place, or a shadow of a great rock in a weary land." O that all who are ambassadors of God may remember the great scope of their ministry, and testify the Gospel of the grace of God! And let all who hear the joyful sound, improve the day of their visitation: blessed are they if they receive the truth in the love thereof; but most aggravated will be their condemnation if they despise the mercy so freely offered them.]

DCCCCLXII.

THE SAINT'S VISION OF CHRIST.

Isai. lii. 8. *They shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.*

EXCEEDINGLY strong and animated are the descriptions given us, in the prophetic writings, respecting the return of the Jews from Babylon^a——— And in that event is God represented as to be pre-eminently glorified^b. But we must not, in reading these glowing passages, confine our attention to that one event: we must bear in mind, that it was altogether typical of our deliverance by Christ; and we must therefore regard it in that view, comprehending under its vivid representations that infinitely greater redemption which it was intended to prefigure. In truth, to understand the prophecies aright, we must remember that they contain, in general, a primary and a secondary sense; primary, as having a literal

^a Read the first three verses of this chapter.

^b ver. 6. with chap. lx. 21.

fulfilment; and secondary, as having a mystical accomplishment under the Christian dispensation. By the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, God's glory was made to appear: but it was more clearly seen in the apostolic age; and will be yet more fully manifested at the latter day. Those periods, it is true, in respect of time, are far asunder: but in respect of purpose they are one; and may be considered, therefore, as declaring one great event, in its commencement, its progress, and its completion. It is in that view that I enter upon the passage before us: from which I shall take occasion to shew you,

I. The views which men had of Christ under the Mosaic economy—

Certainly, under the Mosaic dispensation, their views of Christ were very indistinct—

[True it is, that Christ was then prefigured in his person, work, and offices. It may well be doubted whether there was so much as a pin in the tabernacle which did not correspond with something in Christ; or whether there was any thing in Christ which was not prefigured: for God gave to Moses a model; and agreeably to “that pattern shewn him in the mount,” was every thing made. Still, however, the Mosaic ritual was only a shadow: and, as a shadow will give but a very imperfect conception of a man, especially in his intellectual and moral powers, so did the laws of Moses give a very inadequate representation of Christ, and of the salvation which he was to work out for us. It was to intimate this, that Moses put a veil on his face when he spake to the people under his charge^c: and even the best informed of the prophets themselves were far from comprehending the full import of what they conveyed to us^d. Doubtless “Abraham saw the day of Christ, and rejoiced in the sight^e,” but still both he and all his posterity saw but little, in comparison of what was afterwards revealed to Moses and the prophets: and the prophets themselves, yea, and even John the Baptist, who was the greatest of them all, were inferior in knowledge to the least and meanest of the followers of Christ^f.]

The deliverance from Babylon added but little to the knowledge which the Law conveyed—

^c 2 Cor. iii. 13.

^e John viii. 56.

^d 1 Pet. i. 10, 12.

^f Matt. xi. 11.

[That event indeed, duly considered, would serve to throw light upon our redemption by Christ; and more especially in the view in which it is foretold in the preceding context: "Thus saith the Lord: Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money^g." And, as we shall see presently, it was intended to shadow forth that stupendous effort of God's mercy and love. But still, the temporal blessing that was then imparted, so occupied the minds of all who partook of it, as to swallow up every consideration of the spiritual benefits which the temporal deliverance was ordained to prefigure.]

But men's views of Christ will be found greatly enlarged, if we consider,

II. Those which were vouchsafed to them in the apostolic age—

The passage manifestly refers to that period—

[In the verse preceding our text, the prophet, seeing, as it were, his prediction already carried into effect, exclaims, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth^h." And this very passage does St. Paul quote, as fulfilled, under the Christian dispensation, by those who preach the Gospel of Christⁱ. This shews clearly, that the one event was typical of the other; and that we must look to the Christian dispensation for the accomplishment of the prediction before us. Indeed, it is under the Christian dispensation alone that God does "bring again Zion" to the state from which it had fallen through the apostasies of his unbelieving and gainsaying people.]

Then was Christ seen, comparatively, "eye to eye," and face to face—

[He did assume our nature, and tabernacle amongst men. And though his appearance was mean, even like "a root out of a dry ground^k," yet to a chosen few he revealed himself in a more especial manner, as "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person^l." On one occasion he was transfigured before them, "shining forth as the sun" in its meridian lustre^m: to which event St. Peter refers, when he says, "We were eye-witnesses of his Majestyⁿ." Indeed, his disciples generally "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father^o." Not that they fully understood

^g ver. 3.

^h ver. 7.

ⁱ Rom. x. 15.

^k Isai. liii. 2.

^l Heb. i. 3.

^m Matt. xvii. 2.

ⁿ 2 Pet. i. 16.

^o John i. 14.

his character and mission, until the day of Pentecost: but when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them, then they saw him to be indeed "the Son of God, the Saviour of the world^p." They had seen him, and conversed familiarly with him after his resurrection, for the space of forty days; and had now received the promised effusion of the Holy Ghost; so that there remained no longer any doubt upon their minds: and hence St. John, speaking of him as the incarnate "Word," the eternal Son of God, says, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life . . . that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you . . . And these things we write unto you, that your joy may be full^q." How clear their knowledge was, in comparison of that which men possessed under the Mosaic economy, will be seen to advantage by reading the Epistle to the Hebrews; where the whole of his work and offices, as depicted in the ceremonial law, is fully developed and explained. Hence, then, it was justly said by St. Paul, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him: but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit^r."]

We must however, for the full understanding of the text and views which are there spoken of, we must, I say, look forward to,

III. Those which shall be enjoyed in the latter day—

To this period our text has a still further reference—

[Doubtless many of the Jews were converted to Christ, and many of the Gentiles also, through the ministry of the Apostles: but the bulk of the Jewish nation rejected their testimony, as did the great mass also of the Gentile world: so that Zion still needs to be "brought again," no less than at the first promulgation of Christianity. It cannot yet be said that "the Lord hath made bare his arm in the eyes of *all the nations*, and that *all the ends of the earth* have seen the salvation of our God^s." But that period shall arrive, as the prophet has said; and then only shall my text be fully accomplished.]

Then, indeed, shall men behold our Lord "eye to eye"—

[Some have thought that Christ will appear again personally upon earth, and be seen amongst his followers. Certainly, if that should be, our text will then receive a most

^p 1 John iv. 14.

^r 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.

^q 1 John i. 1—4.

^s ver. 40.

remarkable accomplishment. But without determining any thing respecting that, one thing is clear; namely, there will be a vast increase of light bestowed upon the Church in that day; insomuch, that "the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound^t." We know that there is a veil upon our hearts when we read the word and attend upon God's ordinances; and that, for the most part, it is on some particular occasions only that Christ appears to us in his glory, and manifests himself to us in all the wonders of his love. But in that day this will be a common occurrence amongst all the members of his Church; for "the whole earth shall be filled with the knowledge of *the glory of the Lord*, as the waters cover the sea^u." And so glorious will be the discoveries vouchsafed to them, that "the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and before his ancients, gloriously^x." Then shall be fulfilled what St. John has spoken in the book of Revelation: "There shall be no more curse in the Church; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and *they shall see his face*; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever^y."]

And now let me ask,

1. What views of Christ have *you*?

[St. Paul speaks of Christ as "revealed *in him*^z:" and such is the revelation which we also must have, if ever we would partake of his saving benefits. That he has been revealed to us in the word, will only tend to our heavier condemnation, if "an understanding be not given us, that we may know him;" and a vital power also communicated, "that we may *be in him*," as branches of the living vine^a. O Brethren, rest not in a head-knowledge of the Saviour; but beg of God that he would pour out upon you the Holy Spirit, as "a Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; that the eyes of your understanding being enlightened^b," you may know him in all "his excellency and glory^c." It is the Spirit's office to glorify Christ; and to take of the things that are his, and to "shew them unto you^d." Pray ye therefore, without ceasing, that God, of his infinite mercy, would give you

^t Isai. xxx. 26.

^u Hab. ii. 14.

^x Isai. xxiv. 23.

^y Rev. xxii. 3—5.

^z Gal. i. 16.

^a 1 John v. 20.

^b Eph. i. 17, 18.

^c Isai. xxxv. 2.

^d John xvi. 14.

his Holy Spirit, and, through his divine agency, impart to you that "knowledge of Christ in which alone consists eternal life^e."]

2. What effect has your knowledge of Christ produced upon you?

[From my text we may learn, that, in proportion as we see Christ "eye to eye," we may hope, both in our individual and collective capacity, to be restored to God. And to the same effect says St. Paul; "We all, with open and unveiled face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord^f." Now what know you, Brethren, of this experience? It is not the Law, with its terrors, that can ever effect this: no, nor can a desire of heaven give us a sufficient stimulus, or obtain for us so rich a benefit. Nothing but a sight of Christ can transform the soul into his likeness. Even in heaven this assimilating efficacy is felt and acknowledged: for we there "shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is^g." Study, then, I pray you, his glorious character: survey him diligently, as he is revealed in the word: and cease not to contemplate the wonders of his love, till, "by comprehending the breadth and length and depth and height of it," as far as such an incomprehensible subject can be known, "you be filled with all the fulness of God^h."]

^e John xvii. 3.

^f 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^g 1 John iii. 2.

^h Eph. iii. 18, 19.

DCCCCLXIII.

CHRIST REWARDED FOR HIS SERVICES.

Isai. lii. 13. *Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high.*

IN the writings of Moses, the enjoyment of the land of Canaan was held forth as the great incentive to obedience; and spiritual blessings were but obscurely intimated. But in the prophetic writings, the greatest of temporal blessings were promised rather as pledges of infinitely richer benefits, which they typically represented: and frequently the very language in which they were promised, clearly shewed, that their mystical sense was, in fact, the most literal. Sometimes, as in the prophecy before us, the inspired writer entirely loses sight of all temporal considerations, and is

wholly wrapt up in the contemplation of that spiritual kingdom, which the Messiah was in due season to erect. From the redemption of the Jews out of their captivity in Babylon, he goes on to speak of a more glorious redemption to be effected for all the nations of the world from the dominion of sin and Satan, of death and hell. The means of its accomplishment are described at large from this verse to the end of the following chapter. The Messiah, by whom it was to be effected, is set forth in all that variety of character which he was to assume, and in those diversified states of humiliation and glory which he was to pass through, in order to fulfil the work assigned him. That a passage so decisive for the establishment of Christianity should be wrested by the Jews, and be applied to any one rather than to Christ, is nothing more than what might be expected. But so harsh and incongruous are their interpretations, that they need only to be stated, and the absurdity of them immediately appears. Besides, the numerous applications of this prophecy to Christ, which occur in the New Testament, leave us no room to doubt respecting its true import. The portion, which now demands our attention, declares to us,

I. The success with which he executed the work assigned him—

The office which Christ sustained was that of a “servant.” He was to do his Father’s will, to seek his Father’s glory, and to advance the interests of his Father’s kingdom. On this account the Scriptures frequently speak of him as a servant: “Behold my servant whom I uphold;” “by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many;” “I will bring forth my servant the Branch^a.” Our Lord himself also often speaks of himself under this character: “I have not spoken of myself, says he, but the Father who sent me, he gave me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak^b.” In above thirty other passages in St. John’s gospel he represents

^a Isai. xlii. 1. and liii. 11. and Zech. iii. 8.

^b John xii. 49.

himself as sent by the Father, and as receiving a commandment from him. We must not, however, conceive from hence that he is only a creature; for though in his official capacity he was inferior to the Father, in his own nature he was equal to the Father, as St. Paul tells us; "He was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant^c."

Christ's work as a servant was, to *reveal the Father's will to mankind, to make atonement for their sins, and to reduce them to a state of holy obedience*; or, in other words, to execute the offices of a prophet, a priest, and a king, in compliance with the Father's appointment, and in subserviency to his honour. Now that he delivered his doctrines in the capacity of a servant, is evident from his own repeated confessions; "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me:" "Whatsoever I speak, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak^d." It was also in obedience to his Father's will that he offered himself a sacrifice for sin. Our Lord himself says, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again: no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again: *this commandment have I received of the Father^e*:" and St. Paul also says, that "being found in fashion as a man, he became *obedient unto death, even the death of the cross^f*." Thus also in the manifold exercises of his regal power, whether he cured diseases, rectified abuses, or forgave sins, he acted by an authority delegated to him for that purpose. When, at the very beginning of his ministry he took the sacred volume into his hands to read out of it to the people in the synagogue, he selected this passage, which fully declared to them by what authority he acted; "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath *anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted:*"

^c Phil. ii. 6, 7.

^d John vii. 16. and xii. 50.

^e John x. 17, 18.

^f Phil. ii. 8.

and at another time he told his disciples, that "the Father had *appointed* unto him a kingdom." Thus plain is it, that whether he executed the office of a prophet, priest, or king, he acted in the capacity of a servant.

In the whole of his work he prospered. The text says, "My servant shall *deal prudently*;" but in the margin of the Bible it is put, "shall prosper." This rendering of the word seems rather better to agree with the context, and with that expression in the following chapter, "the pleasure of the Lord shall *prosper* in his hand." The very same word also is used in reference to Christ by Jeremiah, where our translators have given this sense to it; "I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and *prosper*." Let us view this servant of Jehovah in the various offices he performed, and we shall see that he prospered in them all. Was he *teaching the people*? behold, what wonderful things he brought to light; things, which from eternity had been hidden in the bosom of the Father! How did the clouds of ignorance and superstition vanish before him! the corrupt glosses, with which the Jewish doctors had obscured the law, were refuted: the truths of God were established on the firmest basis; the most subtle objectors were put to silence; the most ignorant were instructed in the deepest mysteries; and all, with such condescension, such ease, such wisdom, and such authority, that his very enemies were constrained to say, "Never man spake like this man." Was he *setting up his kingdom*? he rejected with disdain the pomp of earthly monarchs, and laid the foundations of his throne in the hearts of his people. Nor did he bring any into subjection by outward force: a single word was sufficient to subdue the stoutest heart. If he said to Matthew, "Follow me," not all the wealth of kingdoms could detain the willing captive. If he said, "Come down, Zaccheus," behold, a covetous extortioner is instantly transformed into a benevolent and obedient servant. Whomsoever he would, he

called: and such was the constraining power of his voice, that, without hesitation, they left all that they had, and followed him. And though he commanded his subjects to make no account even of their own lives when standing in competition with his will, and promised them nothing but poverty and persecution in this world, yet they all delighted in his law, and gloried in the cross for his sake. So entirely did they yield up themselves to him, that opposition served but to rivet their affections to him, and to confirm them in their determination to live and die in his service. Did he *expiate his people's sins*? behold, there was not any thing wanting either to complete *his obedience*, or to fill up the measure of *his sufferings*. He “fulfilled all righteousness,” even though by so doing he made himself appear to be a sinner like unto us: he not only was circumcised by his parents, but voluntarily submitted to the ordinance of baptism, as though he had needed it for the washing away of his own iniquities. Nor was there any kind of suffering which he did not endure, that he might fully expiate our guilt by bearing in our stead all that our sins had merited. He never ceased from his labours, till he could say in reference to all that he had undertaken to do or suffer for us, “It is finished.”

But must we confine our views of his success to past or future times? Are there not many living witnesses of his power and grace? Is he not teaching some amongst us by his good Spirit, and “revealing unto babes the things that are hidden from the wise and prudent?” Do not many of us also experience the virtue of his blood, and reap the fruits of his continual intercession? Is not his almighty arm yet stretched out to deliver us from our spiritual enemies, and to bring our hearts into captivity to his will? Wherever there is one who is brought out of darkness into marvellous light, one who enjoys peace with God through the blood of sprinkling, and whose corruptions are mortified through the influence of divine truth, there is a monument of our Lord's success, “an epistle of Christ known and read of all men.”

We might further illustrate his success by enumerating the benefits which his mediation has procured : but as these constituted a part of that reward which was conferred on him, we shall wave the mention of them in this place, and proceed to consider,

II. The recompence that was awarded him for his fidelity—

Our Lord, as a servant, “had respect unto the recompence of reward :” “for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross and despised the shame.” Nor was this reward withheld from him, when he had finished his work. St. Paul tells us expressly, that his resurrection and consequent ascension are to be regarded in this view : “He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross ; *therefore* God hath highly exalted him.” Of this also the prophet spake in the words before us : “he shall be exalted, and extolled, and be very high.” Whether the prophet meant to point out three different steps of our Lord’s advancement, we cannot positively say : but his words may well bear that interpretation ; “he shall be exalted” by God to a throne of glory ; “he shall be extolled” by men with adoration and thanksgiving ; and he shall “be very high,” reigning as Head over men and angels for ever and ever. In this view his advancement may be considered as *immediate, progressive, final*.

His *immediate* advancement consisted in his resurrection from the dead, and his elevation to the right hand of the Majesty on high, according to what is said by the Apostle ; “God hath highly *exalted* him, and given him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.” He, who left his glory for our good, resumed it again ; and his human nature is made to participate his glory : yes ; that very body, which endured fatigue and hunger, which was torn with scourges, and pierced with nails, which agonized in the garden, and expired on the cross, is now at the right hand of God in the

highest seat of dignity and honour. That human soul also, that once was harassed with the temptations of Satan, and that endured the wrath of a sin-avenging God, is now assumed into such an union with the godhead, as to be exalted infinitely above the highest archangel. It is in his human nature that the brightest effulgence of the Deity is seen : so that, while he appears as a lamb that has been slain, he is the very joy and glory of heaven, the sun that illumines the regions of the blest ; “ the glory of God doth lighten them, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”

And who does not rejoice that the Saviour should be thus glorified ? Who does not even leap for joy at the thought, that he, who loved us unto death, should be thus exalted far above all principalities and powers ? Surely, independent of the interest which we ourselves have in his advancement, we ought to be exceeding glad that our greatest friend and benefactor should be thus gloriously rewarded.

The next, and more remote step of his advancement was, the *progressive* extending of his kingdom throughout the earth. It is true that, in a very short space of time, there were thousands of souls subjected to his dominion ; and gradually his empire was enlarged among the Gentile world : multitudes in every place took, as it were, an oath of allegiance to him, and were made willing even to lay down their lives for his sake. But yet his kingdom has hitherto been only partially established : there is a time coming when, in the most literal sense, that prophecy of Daniel shall be accomplished, and “ there shall be given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom ; and all people, nations, and languages shall serve him.” This methinks is that prospect, to which our Lord looked forward with peculiar delight as to “ the joy set before him.” When he shall see the whole human race bowing before his footstool, and hear them “ *extolling*” and magnifying his name, he will look back upon the travail of his soul with pleasure and satisfaction, and account himself amply recompensed for all that he has done and suffered.

O that this glorious season might speedily begin ; that his kingdom might come, and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven ! But if we be not favoured to behold this period, let us at least make him the most acceptable return we can for his kindness, by devoting ourselves to his service, and endeavouring to bring others to the obedience of faith.

The *final* step of his advancement will be, when he shall come again to judge the world, and reign over his elect for ever and ever. What he has already received is only a pledge and earnest of what he will hereafter enjoy. At a future period, fixed in the divine counsels, but known to no creature either in heaven or earth, he is to come in his own glory, and in the glory of his Father, surrounded with all the holy angels. He is then to summon the whole universe before him : all, in one vast assembly, will stand at his tribunal, and be judged by him according to their works : those that were his enemies, and would not that he should reign over them, he will cast, together with the fallen angels, into the lake of fire ; but his faithful servants he will take, together with the holy angels, to dwell with him, that they may be one fold under one shepherd for evermore. His mediatorial office indeed he will then lay down, as having no more need to exercise it ; and in this sense, “ he will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all.” But he will not cease to reign as a king over his people ; for the prophet expressly says, that “ of his kingdom there shall be no end.” To all eternity therefore will he be the Head of the church ; to all eternity the one source of their joy, the one object of their adoration. As the glorified saints and angels are already singing, so will they never cease to sing, “ Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, and wisdom and strength, and glory and honour and blessing ; therefore blessing and honour, and glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

IN IMPROVING this subject, we shall find abundant matter of *reproof to the ungodly*, of *encouragement to the humble*, and of *direction to all*.

1. Reproof to the ungodly—

On the most diligent inquiry into the life and conduct of our Lord, we shall find that he omitted nothing that was necessary for the effecting of our reconciliation with God. Yet how ill is he requited by the generality of mankind! Notwithstanding he has come down from heaven for our salvation, and accomplished the work which had been given him to do, the ungodly world will scarcely bestow a thought upon him. Instead of “exalting” him in their minds, and “extolling” him with their lips, and setting him “very high” in their affections, they regard him little more, than if all that is related of him were a mere fable. Every earthly vanity can fix their attention, and engage their favour; but he, whose condescension and grace have filled all heaven with wonder, can attract no notice. What base ingratitude is this on the part of man! What is it but practically to deny the Redeemer’s excellency, and to frustrate, as far as in us lies, the purposes of God respecting him? It is, in fact, to say that, whatever reward God has decreed to give him for his services, he shall receive no part of it from us. And who amongst us has not been guilty of this conduct? Who has not passed months and years without any admiration of his love, any zeal for his honour? If he were as much forgotten by all, as he has been by the generality, his very name would soon be put out of remembrance. What more awful proof of our fallen nature can we have; what greater evidence of our apostasy from God? “If God were our Father, we should love Christ; if we were true believers, he would be precious to our souls.” And if God has said that “all who forget *him* shall be turned into hell,” shall our forgetfulness of his dear Son involve us in no danger? Is it without reason that the Apostle asks, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” Surely if we exalt him

not willingly, he shall be exalted against our will ; for “ he will reign, till he has put every enemy under his feet.” If we will not bow to the sceptre of his grace, we shall be broken in pieces with the rod of his indignation.

2. Encouragement to the humble—

They who are humbly endeavouring to serve God, may, on the other hand, derive from this subject much *comfort* and *encouragement*. As Christ was, so are all his followers, servants of the most high God. Like him too, in spite of men and devils, they prosper in their work. And is there no reward prepared for them ? Shall they not, like him, be exalted to thrones of glory ? Shall they not be extolled by men, as the excellent of the earth ; and by God, as good and faithful servants ? Shall they not be very high, even “ heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ ?” Yes ; God is not ashamed to be called their God : and, as soon as they have overcome, they shall be carried by angels into Abraham’s bosom, and inherit the glory prepared for them. Let the believer then look forward to the recompence of reward. Let him rest assured that the felicity which awaits him will abundantly compensate his labours and sufferings in the pursuit of it : let him “ be faithful unto death, and God will give him a crown of life.” In the meantime, however, they who expect the wages, must be careful to execute the work assigned them. They must “ deal prudently,” that they may prosper ; and “ prosper,” that they may obtain the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give them. But it is not in their own strength that they are to proceed, but in the strength of their exalted Saviour ; of him, who, having endured the same trials, can sympathize with them ; and, having all power in heaven and in earth committed to him, can succour them. To him then let every eye be directed ; to him, in whom all fulness is deposited, and our life itself is hid : and “ when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory.”

3. Direction to all—

While the words before us prophetically declare what Christ shall receive as the reward of his labours, they serve as a direction to every one that names the name of Christ : they virtually enjoin us to pay him the tribute which is so justly due. “What shall I render unto the Lord,” was the reflection that inspired the breast of David on a review of the mercies which he had experienced. And can we call to mind what our blessed Lord has done, and is yet doing, for our salvation, and not feel the liveliest emotions of gratitude in our hearts ? Are we not constrained to break forth in the language of the Psalmist, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits ; bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all that is within me bless his holy name ?” Yes ; “let us abundantly utter the memory of his great goodness, and sing of his praise without ceasing.” It is the most reasonable, and surely the most delightful, of all duties to exalt his name, and magnify it with thanksgiving. Let this then be the disposition of our minds, and the practice of our lives. Let us say, “Awake up, my glory, awake, lute and harp, I myself will awake right early :” “I will sing of his righteousness all the day long ;” “I will praise his name while I have my being.” Then, at whatever period we shall be summoned into his immediate presence, we shall change our place, but not our employment ; for the song, which we began on earth, shall be continued by us to all eternity : “To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God, and the Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

DCCCCLXIV.

THE DEPTH OF OUR SAVIOUR'S HUMILIATION.

Isa. lii. 14, 15.—*As many were astonished at thee^a ; (his visage was so marred, more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men :) so shall he sprinkle many nations.*

^a Should be “him.” Bishop Lowth.

OF all the subjects that ever engaged the attention of the human mind, there is none so important as that which the prophet is now opening : the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament are full of it : it was exhibited in the first promise that was given to man after his fall : it was continued from that period with increasing clearness in the prophecies : it was set before the eyes of men in the sacrifices that were offered : and memorials of it are yet preserved in all Christian churches in the sacrament of the Lord's supper. Our Lord himself frequently introduced it in his discourses : it was the one topic of conversation when he talked with Moses and Elias on the mount of transfiguration. The Apostles in their sermons and epistles represent it as the foundation of all their hopes. Paul found it to be such an irresistible weapon, and so mighty to destroy the strong holds of sin and Satan, that he determined to know nothing among his people but Jesus Christ and him crucified. This is that mystery, in which are contained all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. It is so extensive a field for meditation, that, though we traverse it ever so often, we need never resume the same track : and it is such a marvellous fountain of blessedness to the soul, that, if we have ever drunk of its refreshing streams, we shall find none other so pleasant to our taste ; or rather, we shall never wish to taste any other. To the consideration of this subject, we are immediately led by the words before us, in which we may observe both *our Lord's unparalleled humiliation*, and *the ends for which he submitted to it*.

I. His unparalleled humiliation—

In order to mark this the more distinctly, we will briefly notice *the different steps of it* from his cradle to his grave. Notwithstanding he was the Creator of the universe, he had no fitter place for his reception than a stable, no better accommodation than a manger : nor had he long made his appearance in the world before his life was sought, and he was driven a

fugitive from his native country. Till the age of thirty his occupation was that of a carpenter, at which business he worked with his reputed father. And during the four last years of his life, nothing could exceed the contempt and ignominy with which he was treated. He was called a deceiver, a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber: he was said to be in league with Satan himself: and the people thought they spake well and properly concerning him, when they said, He hath a devil, and is mad^b: yea, they even called him Beelzebub, the prince of the devils^c. But, most of all, when the time of his crucifixion drew nigh, then all ranks of people seemed to vie with each other in insulting him. They arrayed him in mock majesty with a purple robe, a crown of thorns on his head, and a reed or cane in his hand for a sceptre. They spat on him, they smote him, they plucked off his beard, according to that prediction, 'I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting^d.' Nor was this the conduct of a few only: for he was universally execrated; he was considered as "a worm and no man, the very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people:" he was "one, whom man despised, and whom the nation *abhorred*." Having loaded him with all manner of indignities, and "plowed up his back with scourges, so as to make long furrows" in it, they nailed him to the cross, and left him to hang there, till exhausted nature should sink under the torments inflicted on him.

But, as others of mankind have been called to endure many things, let us particularly notice *wherein his sufferings were unparalleled*; for it is certain that "his visage was marred more than any man's." And here we shall find that *both in variety and intenseness*, they infinitely surpassed all that ever were sustained by any human being. In his *civil state*, as a member of society, he was degraded so low, that even a murderer was preferred before him. In his *natural state*,

^b John viii. 48.^c Matt. x. 25.^d Isai. l. 6.

as a man, he was eminently distinguished above all the human race as "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." He suffered much in *his body*, from labours, watchings, fastings; from the want even of a place where to lay his head; from the wounds made in it from head to foot, by the thorns, the scourges, and the nails. We may judge of this by what is said of him in the Psalms; "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels: my strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death^e." The troubles of *his soul* were yet greater still. Of these he himself frequently complained: "Now is my *soul* troubled; my *soul* is exceeding sorrowful even unto death." To such a degree was he agitated by internal conflicts, that, before he was even apprehended by his enemies, he was in an agony, and sweat great drops of blood from every pore of his body. Moreover, as his sufferings were thus various, so did they also spring from a variety of sources, *from men, from devils, and from God himself*. *Men* laboured to the utmost to torment him by calumnies and reproaches, by taunts and revilings, and by all the cruelties that the most inveterate malice could devise and execute. *Satan* assaulted him with fiery temptations in the wilderness; and all the powers of darkness conflicted with him at the close of life. *His heavenly Father* too hid his face from him in the hour of his greatest extremity, and "bruised him" for the iniquities of his people, and called forth the sword of vengeance to slay "the man that was his fellow^f."

Together with this *variety* of sufferings, let us take a view also of their *intensity*. In drinking this bitter cup, he found *nothing to mitigate* his sorrows, but *every thing to aggravate* them to the uttermost. If we except the sympathy of a few women, he met with nothing but scorn and contempt from all who beheld him. Not even his beloved disciples afforded

^e Ps. xxii. 14, 15.

^f Zech. xiii. 7.

him any comfort; on the contrary, he was betrayed by one, denied by another, and forsaken by all. All orders and degrees of men were alike inveterate and devoid of mercy. Of this he himself complains by the prophet, "I looked for some to take pity on me, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none; they gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink^g." When, in the depth of his dereliction he cried, "Eli, Eli! lama sabacthani? My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" so far from pitying, they, with unexampled cruelty, played or punned, as it were, upon his words, and mocked him as idolatrously calling upon Elias, instead of upon God; and, when he complained of thirst, they gave him vinegar, to increase his anguish, instead of a draught calculated to assuage it. Nor did he receive consolation from God, any more than pity from men. On the contrary, his heavenly Father now hid his face from him, and thereby extorted from him that bitter complaint which we have just recited. The united efforts of men and devils could not shake his constancy: but the hidings of his Father's face seemed more than he could endure; so painful was it to find an estrangement there, where he could alone look for comfort and support. There were many things also which concurred to aggravate his sufferings beyond measure. It is not improbable that *the perfection of his nature* rendered him more susceptible of pain than other men: but however this might be, certainly *his zeal for God* must have given a tenfold poignancy to all his anguish. Consider that immaculate Lamb tempted by Satan to distrust his Father's care, and turn the stones into bread for his support; then to presume upon his Father's care, and cast himself down from a pinnacle of the temple; and then to deny his Father altogether, and to worship the devil in preference to him; how horrible must such suggestions be to his holy soul! Peculiar stress is laid on this by the Apostle, who says, "He suffered, being tempted:" and we are told, he was

^g Ps. lxix. 20, 21.

so distressed by the conflict, that an angel was sent from heaven to strengthen him. The dereliction also before mentioned, must have been afflictive in proportion to the regard which he bore towards his heavenly Father. *His love for men* must also have been a source of inconceivable trouble to his mind. If "Lot vexed his righteous soul from day to day;" and David had "rivers of waters running down his eyes;" and Isaiah exclaimed, "Look away from me, I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me;" and Jeremiah cried, "My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart;" on account of the ungodliness they beheld, and the consequences they foresaw; what must Jesus have felt when he saw, not only the wickedness of men's actions, but all the enmity of their hearts against God, and knew the full extent of those judgments which were soon to come upon them? How must the pride of the Pharisees, the unbelief of the Sadducees, the cruelty of the Herodians, and the stupidity of his own disciples wound his soul! *The foresight which he had of his own sufferings* must have been a still further aggravation of them. In many instances the expectation of pain is even worse than the pain itself; what then must he have endured, when, from the very beginning, he foresaw every thing that should come upon him! To complete the whole, *the accumulation of all his sorrows at once* must have added so greatly to their weight, that, if he had not been God as well as man, he could never have sustained the load.

See then whether "the visage of any man was ever so marred as his?" Others, if they have been tried in body, have had comfort in their soul: if they have been persecuted by man, they have received succour from God: or if their trials have been of a diversified nature, still they have found some to commiserate, and, by a tender sympathy at least, to participate their lot: but HE trod the wine-press of God's wrath alone, and drank, even to the dregs, that cup of bitterness, which the sins of the whole world had prepared for him, and which could not be removed

consistently with God's honour and man's salvation. Well therefore may we put into his mouth those words of the prophet, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger^h." Well too, as the text observes, might "many be astonished at him;" for whether we consider the innocence of him on whom these sufferings were inflicted, or the greatness of him who submitted to them, or his meekness and patience in enduring them, we are equally lost in wonder and astonishment.

Upon a view of our Lord's unparalleled humiliation, we are naturally led to inquire into,

II. The end for which he submitted to it—

Moses, speaking of the truths which he was inspired to proclaim, says, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass; because I will publish the name of the Lordⁱ." By a similar figure "the sprinkling of the nations" may be understood as relating to the publication of the Gospel to the whole world. And doubtless this was, in a general view, the end for which our Saviour died. But the term "sprinkling" alludes more particularly to the sprinklings which were made under the law. These were sometimes *of blood*, as when the mercy-seat was sprinkled with the blood of bulls and goats on the great day of annual expiation^k. Sometimes the sprinkling was of *water*, as when a person ceremonially unclean was purified from his defilement by water of separation^l. Sometimes the sprinkling was both of *water and blood*, as when the leper was cleansed by the blood of a bird mixed with running water^m. To all of these there is a reference in the text: and from these ceremonial observances, especially as they are more fully opened to us in the New Testament, we learn distinctly the ends of the Redeemer's sufferings.

^h Lam. i. 12.

ⁱ Deut. xxxii. 2.

^k Lev. xvi. 15.

^l Numb. xix. 13.

^m Lev. xiv. 6, 7.

He suffered, first, *that he might purge us from the guilt of sin by his blood*. To this the inspired writers bear witness with one consent. They declare that he was a propitiation for our sins; that we are reconciled to God by his death, and that we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Even the saints that are in heaven are represented as singing praises to him that loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and as ascribing their salvation wholly to the Lamb that was slain. Behold then, ye who are bowed down under a sense of guilt; draw nigh to Calvary, and see the provision made for your salvation: God had ordained, that without shedding of blood there should be no remission; and behold, here is the blood of that spotless Lamb once offered for you on the cross. Take of this by faith, and sprinkle it on your hearts and consciences; and you shall find it effectual to cleanse from sins of deepest die. The true Christian is characterized by the Apostle as having “come to the blood of sprinklingⁿ.” Let us then answer to this character: so shall we be protected from the sword of the destroying angel^o, and sing for ever the song of Moses, and possess the white and spotless robes in which the redeemed are arrayed before the throne of God^p.

The other end of Christ's suffering was, *that he might cleanse us from the power and pollution of sin by his Spirit*. It had been promised by the prophet, “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you^q.” And it was to procure this benefit for us, that Christ submitted to his sufferings; “He gave himself for us,” says the Apostle, “that he might sanctify and cleanse us with the washing of water, by the word, that he might present us to himself holy and without blemish^r.” Let us then draw near to him, “having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure

ⁿ Heb. xii. 24.^o Heb. xi. 28.^p Rev. vii. 14, 15.^q Ezek. xxxvi. 25.^r Eph. v. 25—27.

water.” “ Since he bare our sins in his own body, on purpose that we, being dead unto sin, might live unto righteousness,” let us not be unmindful of our duty and our privilege. Let us seek “ the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost,” and labour to “ cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

It is of great importance to observe, that though, under the law, these two kinds of sprinkling were often separated, they are invariably united under the Gospel. St. John particularly notices, that “ Christ came by water and blood ; not by water only, but by water and blood^s.” By this we understand, that the water and blood, which flowed in one united stream from the wounded side of the Redeemer, were significant of the united blessings which we should receive from him, namely, of justification by his blood, and sanctification by his Spirit. And St. Peter expressly declares, that these ends were united in the eternal counsels of the Deity, by whom we were “ elected through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ^t.” What God therefore has joined together, let us never presume to separate : for, as there is no “ redemption but by the blood” of Jesus, so “ without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”

The connexion between these blessings, and the means used for the procuring of them, is frequently mentioned in the ensuing chapter, and therefore need not be insisted on in this place. Suffice it therefore at present to say, that the sprinkling of the nations is the fruit and consequence of our Lord’s astonishing, unparalleled humiliation^u. Neither could he have had a right to communicate salvation, if he had not first suffered for our sins ; nor can we enjoy his salvation, unless we receive it as the purchase of his blood.

TO CONCLUDE—

^s 1 John v. 6.

^t 1 Pet. i. 2.

^u “ *As,*” “ *so.*”

The blessings mentioned in the text were not procured for one nation only, but for “many” even for all, to the remotest ends of the earth. And as no nation is excluded, so neither is any individual in any nation. The fountain is opened for all; and will cleanse from sin and uncleanness all who wash in it. As “Moses took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and *sprinkled all the people*^x,” so now may every sinner in the universe have his heart and conscience sprinkled through faith in God’s promises. None can say, ‘I am too vile; the blood of Christ can never cleanse from such guilt as mine:’ nor can they say, ‘My lusts are so inveterate, that the Spirit of Christ can never purify my polluted heart;’ for, “if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sanctified, in *any* instance, to the purifying of the flesh, much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge, in *every* instance, our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

^x Heb. ix. 19.

DCCCCLXV.

THE MEANS AND EVIDENCE OF CONVERSION.

Isai. lii. 15. *Kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them, shall they see; and that which they had not heard, shall they consider.*

MANY are advocates for the preaching of morality in preference to the unfolding of the mysteries of the Gospel, because they think that men will be more easily influenced by what they know and understand, than by any thing which surpasses their comprehension. But to judge thus is to be wiser than God, who has commanded his Gospel to be preached to all nations, and has appointed it as the means of converting the world unto himself. The most wonderful effects have been produced by it, not only on the vulgar, who might be thought open to deception, but on persons of the most cultivated minds, and most

extensive influence. From the first promulgation of it to the present moment, events have justified the prediction before us; for “kings,” on hearing of a crucified Saviour, have “shut their mouths before him,” and acknowledged him as the foundation of all their hopes.

The terms in which this prophecy is expressed will lead us to consider, *The means of conversion*, and, *The fruit and evidence of it*:

I. The means of conversion—

God is not limited to the use of any means. He, who by a word brought the universe into existence, can, with a simple act of his will, produce any change in the state and condition of his creatures, or do whatsoever pleaseth him. Nevertheless he has appointed a method of converting souls to the knowledge of himself: and though we presume not to say what changes he may effect in the minds of unenlightened heathens, yet we have no reason to expect that he will dispense with the means where he has sent the light of his Gospel. The means which God has appointed for the conversion of men may be considered either as *external* or *internal*; the external is, The preaching of the Gospel; the internal is, The seeing and considering of that Gospel.

With respect to the *external* mean, the prophet speaks of it as “that which kings had not heard.” He has just intimated that the sufferings of the Messiah should exceed all that ever were experienced by man; but that, at the same time, they should avail for the expiating of our guilt, and the purifying of our souls from sin. He then adds, that the great and mighty of the earth should be made to consider these glad tidings; and that, after some opposition for a season, they should become the willing subjects of the Messiah’s kingdom. In this way St. Paul himself understood the words of our text; for he quotes them exactly in this sense; “So have I strived,” says he, “to preach *the Gospel*, not where *Christ was named*, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation; but *as it is*

written, To whom HE was not spoken of, they shall see, and they that have not heard, shall understand^a." And, indeed, this is a very just description of the Gospel; for, the productions of human wisdom were open to the view of kings: but the Gospel was far out of their sight; it was "a mystery hid in the bosom of the Father from the foundation of the world."

This was the weapon which the apostles used in their warfare. They preached Christ in every place: Jesus and the resurrection were their constant theme: and so effectual did St. Paul find it for the conversion of men, that "he determined to know nothing, and to preach nothing, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." The same must be the constant tenour of our ministrations: there is no other subject that we can insist upon with equal effect. Philosophy leaves men as it finds them: it may afford some glimmering light to their minds; but it can never influence their hearts. Nothing can pull down the strong holds of sin, but that which points out a refuge for sinners.

But besides this external mean of conversion there is another no less necessary, the operation of which is altogether *internal*. Many hear the Gospel, and, instead of receiving benefit from it, have only their latent enmity brought forth, and their hearts made more obdurate. To feel its full effect, we must "see and consider it." There are many things of which we may have but dark and confused views without sustaining any loss; but in our views of the Gospel we should be clear. Our minds must be enlightened to see the ends and reasons of Christ's death. To know the fact, That he did suffer, will be of no more use than any other historical knowledge: we must know *why* he suffered; what necessity there was for his coming in the flesh; what need of his atonement; and what the virtue of his sacrifice. It is not necessary indeed that we should be able to descant upon these subjects for the instruction of others; but we must have such a knowledge of them as leads us to renounce every false ground of hope, and to rely on

^a Rom. xv. 20, 21.

Christ alone for the salvation of our souls. We must so discern their excellence, as to be induced to “consider” them ; to consider the death of Christ as the only sacrifice for sin ; and to consider an interest in it as the only means for salvation.

Thus, in order to our being effectually converted to God, Christ must become our meditation and delight. The height and depth, and length and breadth of his unsearchable love must occupy our minds, and inflame our hearts with love to him. Nor is it in our first conversion only, but in every subsequent period of our lives, that we must thus have respect to his death. In all our approaches to God we must come, pleading the merits of the Redeemer’s blood, and trusting only in his all-sufficient atonement. It is this alone that will preserve our souls in peace, or enable us to manifest to others,

II. The fruit and evidence of conversion—

The hearts of men are the same in all ages ; and the effects produced on them by the Gospel are the same : the very first fruit and evidence of our conversion by it is, that our “mouths are shut *at*, or *before* the Lord Jesus.” First, *with respect to the vindicating of ourselves*. Natural men, according to the external advantages they have enjoyed, will acknowledge more or less the depravity of their hearts. But, whatever difference there may be in their outward confessions, there is very little in their inward convictions. All entertain a favourable opinion of themselves : they cannot unfeignedly, and with the full consent of their minds, acknowledge their desert of God’s wrath : they have some hidden reserves : they secretly think that God would be unjust if he were to condemn them : they cannot persuade themselves that their iniquities merit so severe a doom. They pretend to hope in God’s mercy ; but their hope does not really arise from an enlarged view of his mercy, so much as from contracted views of their own sinfulness. But, in conversion, these “high imaginations are cast down.” The soul, enlightened to

behold its own deformity, dares no longer rest on such a sandy foundation. Others may go presumptuously into God's presence, "thanking him that they are not as other men;" but the true convert "stands afar off," and, with an unfeigned sense of his own unworthiness, "smites on his breast, and cries for mercy." Instead of preferring himself before others, he now "prefers others before himself," and accounts himself "the very chief of sinners." Nor, however eminent his attainments afterwards may be, will he ever exalt himself. Paul indeed, when compelled to assert the dignity of his apostolic office, did declare that he was "not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles:" but, to shew how far such declarations were from being either agreeable to himself, or voluntary, he repeatedly called himself "a fool in boasting," and said, that, after all, "he was nothing." Thus any other Christian may be necessitated on some occasion to vindicate his own character; but, so far from priding himself in it, he will lothe himself in dust and ashes, crying with the convicted leper, "Unclean, unclean!" The habitual frame of his mind will be like that of Job, "Behold, I am vile."

Further, the mouth of every true convert will be shut *with respect to the raising of objections against the Gospel*. *The doctrine* of the cross is foolishness in the eyes of the natural man. To renounce all dependence on our works, and rely wholly on the merits of another, is deemed absurd. The way of salvation by faith alone is thought to militate against the interests of morality, and to open a door to all manner of licentiousness. On the other hand, *the precepts* of the gospel appear too strict; and the holiness and self-denial required by it are judged impracticable, and subversive both of the comforts and duties of social life. But real conversion silences these objections. When the Gospel is "seen and considered" in its true light, Christ is no longer made "a butt of contradiction^b:" the glory of God as shining in his face is both seen and admired, and the union of the divine

^b Luke ii. 34.

perfections as exhibited in the mystery of redemption is deemed the very masterpiece of divine wisdom. The believer finds no disposition to open his mouth *against* these things, but rather to open it in devoutest praises and thanksgivings *for* them. As for the way of salvation by faith alone, how suitable, how delightful does it appear! He is convinced that, if salvation were less free or less complete than the Gospel represents it, he must for ever perish. He sees that it is exactly such a salvation as was most fit for God to give, and for man to receive; for that, if it were not altogether of grace, man would have whereof to boast before God; and that, if one sinless work were required of him, he must for ever sit down in utter despair. Nor does he now think the precepts of the Gospel too strict: there is not so much as one of them that he would dispense with; not one which he would have relaxed. He would account it an evil, rather than a benefit, to be released from his obligation to obey them. He never now complains, "How strict are the commandments!" but rather, "How vile am I, that I cannot yield to them a more cordial and unreserved obedience!" And so far is he from condemning those who are most holy and heavenly in their deportment, he wishes that he were like them; and strives to follow them as they follow Christ.

Such are the fruits that are found on all true converts without exception; even "Kings shut their mouths." They indeed, from their high station, are less under the controul of human laws, and are ready on that account to suppose themselves less amenable also to the laws of God: but, when the Gospel comes with power to their souls, they no longer ask, "Who is Lord over us?" but prostrate themselves before the Saviour with unreserved submission both to his providence and grace.

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. The evil and danger of prejudice—

It is difficult to conceive what destruction this evil principle brings upon the world. Thousands of persons

in every place take exceptions against Christ and his Gospel without ever examining for themselves: they even shut their ears against every thing which may be said in vindication of the truth; and thus harden themselves in their iniquities, till they perish without a remedy. Whence is it that so many have their mouths opened against the followers of Christ, stigmatizing every godly person as an enthusiast or deceiver? Have they searched into, and acquainted themselves with the real effects of the Gospel? And have they been careful to distinguish between the tendency of the Gospel itself, and the faults of those who embrace it? No: they have never considered, never seen, perhaps scarcely ever so much as heard, the Gospel: they have listened to some vague reports; they have gladly entertained every story which could in any wise confirm their aversion to the truth; and then they think they cannot exclaim too bitterly against it. But let us guard against indulging such an unreasonable disposition: let us hear and examine candidly for ourselves: let us consider whether the Gospel be not suited to our own particular case: and let us beg of God to open our eyes, and to “give us a right judgment in all things.” If we use not these means of conversion, we shall be utterly inexcusable before God: but if we use them in dependence upon God, we shall surely be brought at last to the knowledge of the truth, and to the enjoyment of those blessings which that truth is sent to convey.

Let us further LEARN from this subject,

2. The excellency of the Gospel—

If we compare the effects of the Gospel with those wrought by philosophy, we shall see that the latter never was able to produce any general reformation, while the former, in the space of a few years, triumphed over all the lusts and prejudices of mankind. And, at this hour, the Gospel has the same power, wherever it is faithfully preached, and cordially received: there is no lust, however inveterate, which it will not subdue; no enmity, however rooted, which

it will not slay; no pride, however stubborn, which it will not humble. The more it is examined, the more it prevails: it needs only to be “seen and considered;” and it will soon remove every objection, and commend itself with irresistible evidence to the soul. Let us then consider, and reflect upon this glorious subject: let us meditate on it, till our hearts are inflamed with love towards our adorable Redeemer: and let our mouths be never opened more, but in thanksgivings to God and to the Lamb.

DCCCCLXVI.

MEN'S NEGLECT OF THE GOSPEL.

Isai. liii. 1.—*Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*

WHEREVER we turn our eyes, we find much occasion for sorrow and lamentation. The miseries which sin has brought into the world, and which are daily multiplied by the follies and wickedness of man, have rendered this state a vale of tears, not only to those who most feel their weight, but to those, who, exempt from their pressure, are yet disposed to sympathize with their afflicted brethren. But there is one subject in particular, that affords matter for the deepest regret to every benevolent mind; it is, the unconcern, which men in general manifest for their eternal interests. This caused “rivers of tears to flow down the eyes” of David, and “great horror to take hold upon him.” It was on account of this, that Jesus, unmindful of the acclamations of surrounding multitudes, stopped to weep over the murderous Jerusalem. The Prophet Isaiah, laboured much to counteract this awful infatuation: but, except to a very few, who “were as signs and wonders” in the land, his efforts were unavailing; and he was constrained to take up this lamentation over them, “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?”

For the fuller understanding of these words we shall inquire, *What is the report here referred to? and what reception it meets with in the world?*

I. What is the report here referred to ?

When our Lord expounded the Scriptures to the two disciples in their way to Emmaus, he shewed them, that, according to the prophecies, "Christ ought to have suffered, and by sufferings to enter into his glory^a. Indeed, that was the general testimony of all the prophets^b; and more especially is it opened to us in the chapter now under our consideration.

A more wonderful report never reached the ears of man. God was manifest in the flesh. The Son of God, "Jehovah's Fellow^c," not only assumed our nature, but, in our nature, died; "he became obedient unto death, even the accursed death of the cross." To this he submitted for our sake, and in our stead; to expiate our guilt, and, by the sacrifice of himself, to reconcile us unto God. Well might the Apostle say, "Great is the mystery of godliness;" for indeed it almost exceeds the bounds of credibility.

But, strange as this report may seem, there never was any other so well authenticated, or established by such a variety of evidence. A series of prophecies respecting it, respecting not only the general outlines, but even the minutest, and most contingent circumstances of it, has been given to the Church during the space of four thousand years. Every one of these has been fulfilled; and *that* too by the very persons who laboured to the utmost to destroy the credit of the report itself. The typical representations of it also were so numerous that no human foresight could have contrived them, nor could any human power have caused a combination of such various, and, to all appearance, contradictory circumstances in one event. Without noticing therefore the miracles wrought in confirmation of it, we may well affirm that "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance."

With respect to its importance, never was there any other report so universally interesting as this:

^a Luke xxiv. 26, 27.

^b 1 Pet. i. 11.

^c Zech. xii. 7.

for it is not confined to a single state or kingdom, but to all the kingdoms of the earth, and to every individual from Adam to the latest of his posterity. Nor does any thing less than their eternal salvation depend upon it: they, who welcome it, will find acceptance with God; and they, who reject it, will be “punished with everlasting destruction from his presence^d.” It is, in short, that Gospel, which “he that believeth shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned^e.”

And what tidings were ever so replete with joy? The most signal deliverances, the most complete victories, the most glorious acquisitions, enhanced by every thing that can be supposed to exhilarate the mind, are no more, in comparison of this, than a twinkling star to the meridian sun. Even the angelic hosts, when they came to announce the wonderful event, proclaimed it as “glad tidings of great joy to all people.” None ever believed the news, but he was instantly liberated from all his fears and sorrows, and filled with “joy unspeakable and glorified^f.”

Such then is the report referred to in the text: a report so *marvellous*, that it fills heaven and earth with wonder; so *true*, that we may as well doubt our own existence as entertain a doubt respecting it; so *interesting*, that all the concerns of time and sense are, in comparison of it, but as the dust of the balance; and so *joyous*, that it is a certain and inexhaustible source of happiness to all who receive it.

But that there are few who truly believe it, will appear whilst we shew,

II. What reception it meets with in the world?

If the estimate which men form of themselves were true, we should rather have to ask, “Who hath *not* believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord *not* been revealed?” For all imagine themselves to be believers; and, because they have been baptized into the name of Christ, they conceive themselves to be possessed of real faith. But I must

^d 2 Thess. i. 8.

^e Mark xvi. 16.

^f 1 Pet. i. 8.

say with the Apostle, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves^g." To ascertain the point, I beg you to ask yourselves two questions, viz. *How you obtained your faith?* and, *How it operates?* Do not suppose that the faith of Christ is a bare assent to truths which you have been taught by your parents, or that it is that kind of conviction which is founded upon a consideration of evidence, such as you would feel respecting any common report which was substantiated to your satisfaction. True "faith is the gift of God^h." In my text, the believing of this report is identified with "a revelation of Jehovah's arm" to effect that faith: and true faith can result from nothing but the almighty power of God forming it in the soul. If ever you have "believed, it must have been through the operation of divine graceⁱ;" and that operation sought by fervent prayer — — — In connexion with that question, ask yourselves further, *How your faith operates?* Where it is real, "it works by love^k," and "overcomes the world^l," and "purifies the heart^m." See then, Brethren, whether your faith produce these effects; for, if it do not, it is but "a dead faith," "the faith of devilsⁿ." If you examine yourselves in this way, you will find that there is still the same occasion as ever for the complaint in my text. The prophet Isaiah adopted it in reference to those to whom he ministered. Our blessed Lord, notwithstanding he wrought so many miracles, was constrained to witness the same obstinate unbelief amongst his hearers^o: and even the Apostle Paul, who was God's instrument to plant so many churches, yet saw reason to declare that these words were still verified in his day^p! And what must *I* say, my brethren? You can bear me witness that, from the first moment that I began to minister amongst you, this report has been faithfully delivered to you: but "Who hath believed our report?" In how few

^g 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

^h Eph. ii. 8.

ⁱ Acts xviii. 27.

^k Gal. v. 6.

^l 1 John v. 4.

^m Acts xv. 9.

ⁿ Jam. ii. 19.

^o John xii. 37, 38.

^p Rom. x. 16.

amongst you does it produce its proper effect, so as to demonstrate that God's arm has indeed been revealed to *you*! Nay, I will even appeal to you, whether at this moment a true Believer, who shews forth his faith by his works, and lives altogether by faith in the Son of God, as having loved *him*, and given himself for *him*, be not at this very hour, just as in the prophet's day, "a sign and a wonder^a." Yes, such characters are still as "men wondered at:" nor is it so in this place only, but in every place where the truth is preached with fidelity and power. And this is a proof, that the report in my text is but little credited even in this Christian land.

Now then let me ADDRESS myself,

1. To those who think they believe—

Justly does the Apostle say, "All men have not faith^s." And this he speaks, not of professed heathens, but of those who were joined to the Church of Christ. So, Brethren, I must say to you, "All are not Israel who are of Israel^t." I entreat you not to take for granted that you are right; but bring your faith to the test. Inquire carefully into its *origin* and *operation*: for, if your faith be not "the faith of God's elect," it will only deceive you to your ruin. You all know how the Jews deceived themselves, by indulging a vain confidence, that because they were the natural descendants of Abraham, they were in a state of acceptance with God. And be assured, that the same fatal error obtains to a vast extent amongst us. If called to give a reason of the hope that is in you, how many are there who could only refer us to their birth of Christian parents, and their baptism into the faith of Christ? But *that* is no other reason than what a Mohammedan or a Hindoo might give for *his* hopes, and *his* professions. If you would not perish with the unbelieving world, I charge you, before God, to dismiss from your minds all such

^a Isai. viii. 18.

^s 2 Thess. iii. 2.

^r Zech. iii. 8.

^t Rom. ix. 6.

delusive expectations, and to seek from God that true faith which alone can sanctify and save the soul.

2. To those who really possess the faith of Christ.

Such, I doubt not, are to be found amongst you. Yes, some of you, I trust, can call God to witness, that you have again and again “fled to Christ for refuge as to the hope set before you,” and that you “count all things but dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord.” To you then I say, that God has conferred upon you the greatest gift that you can possess in this world. Crowns and kingdoms, in comparison of it, were no more than the dust upon the balance. In possessing real faith, you have obtained the forgiveness of all your sins. You have also within your own bosom a sanctifying principle, which shall progressively transform you into the very image of your God. And for you is reserved “an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.” What then will you render to the Lord for these great benefits? This do: Consecrate yourselves to God so wholly and entirely, that when the question is asked, “Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?” all who witness your life and conversation may point to *you*, and say, “That man carries his own evidence along with him: however I may doubt of others, I can entertain no doubt respecting him.” *This*, my dear brethren, is what God expects from you. He expects that you should “shine forth as lights in the world, and so hold forth the word of life, as to prove to all, that we have not laboured in vain, or run in vain^u.”

^u Phil. ii. 15, 16.

DCCCCLXVII.

THE CHARACTERS AND TREATMENT OF THE MESSIAH.

Isai. liii. 2, 3. *For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness: and, when we shall see him, there is no beauty*

that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men ; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief : and we hid as it were our faces from him : he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

WE find in almost every branch of science, that truth can be discovered only by deep and serious investigation. If we rest in superficial inquiries, we shall be led into numberless and fatal mistakes. In what relates to religion more especially, an impartial examination is necessary, because the doctrines of revelation are confessedly repugnant both to the prejudices and passions of mankind. Yet, strange as it may appear, there is no other science, wherein men form their opinions on such slender information, as in that. The generality adopt the notions that are current in their day, without ever considering whether they be right or wrong : the natural consequence of which is, that, in many instances, they embrace error in preference to truth. This was too much the habit of the Jews in reference to their Messiah. Our Lord had cautioned them not to judge according to appearance, but to judge righteous judgment ; nevertheless they paid more attention to received opinions than to the oracles of God. Had they searched the Scriptures, they might have found that their expected Messiah was to suffer as well as to triumph : but they, thinking only of a temporal deliverer, despised the low condition of Jesus, and made his humiliation a ground of rejecting him. That such would be their conduct, the prophet had foretold in the words before us ; wherein he assigns the low estate of Jesus as the very ground, on which the united testimony of Prophets and Apostles should be discredited.

In the words themselves he sets forth,

First, Some marks and characters of the Messiah, and, Secondly, The treatment he should meet with in the world.

I. The marks and characters given of the Messiah were not only exceeding various, but apparently inconsistent with each other ; and they were multiplied

in the prophetic writings, in order that, when the Messiah should appear, there should be no room to question his divine mission; since the marks themselves could not have been combined by chance, nor would have been invented by any one, who had desired to impose upon the world.

Confining ourselves to those specified in the text, we observe, that he was to be *obscure in his origin*. This is intimated under the figure of “a root out of a dry ground.” The house of David had once flourished as the cedars of Lebanon; (he himself having been one of the most powerful monarchs upon earth) but now his family was reduced; insomuch that it was like “a root” or mere stump of a tree. Its situation too, like a “root in a dry ground,” was such, as not to afford any prospect that it should ever revive again. Our Lord, like a weak and tender sucker, sprang from this root, and was, to all outward appearance, unworthy of notice. Notwithstanding the prodigies that attended his birth, and the regard paid to them for a little while, “he grew up before him,” that is, before the Jewish people, in obscurity, working at the trade of his reputed father as a carpenter. This circumstance proved an offence, and a stumbling-block to the carnal Jews: when they heard his discourses, and saw the wonders that he wrought, they said, “Whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given to him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter? And they were offended at him.” But, if they had duly considered their own prophecies, they would have seen, that his parentage and education were precisely such as had been foretold, and consequently were arguments in favour of his high pretensions.

Another mark exhibited in the text is, that he was to be *mean in his appearance*. The Jews expected a Messiah who should come with pomp, and whose magnificence should equal, if not surpass, that of any potentate on earth: and if Jesus had appeared in this manner, he would soon have been caressed and

followed by the whole nation. But he neither possessed himself, nor promised to his followers, any of those things which are so captivating to a carnal heart. Instead of abounding in wealth, and having the great and nobles of the earth as his attendants, he was followed only by a few poor fishermen, and sometimes wanted the common necessities of life, and even a place where to lay his head. Instead of affecting honour, he declined it, and withdrew himself, when they would have invested him with royal authority. Nor did he give his disciples reason to expect any thing in this world but reproaches, persecutions, imprisonments, and death. Thus was he destitute of all external recommendations; "there was no form nor comeliness in him, nor any beauty for which he was to be desired." Now the Jews did not know how to reconcile his claims to Messiahship with his low condition: they could not divest themselves of their prejudices: they expected a temporal Messiah, and consequently concluded, that the meanness of his appearance was a very sufficient reason for considering him as an impostor. They therefore contributed to make him still more contemptible in the eyes of men, and thus, by reducing him to the lowest state of infamy, unwittingly fulfilled the counsels of God concerning him.

A third mark and character of the Messiah was, that he should be *afflicted in his person*; he was to be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." To none were these words ever so applicable as to Jesus Christ. His whole life was a continued scene of labours, trials, temptations, sorrows. We read only once in the whole Scriptures, that he rejoiced in spirit; but frequently that he sighed, and groaned, and wept. The four last years of his life were almost wholly spent in sorrow. Not to mention his bodily labours and fatigues, or his watchings and fastings (though inasmuch as they exceeded all that ever were voluntarily endured by man, they might well be taken into the account) his other trials were greater than we can conceive. "*The contradiction of sinners*

against himself" must have been inexpressibly painful to his benevolent mind. He had come down from heaven to give his own life a ransom for them; and was continually endeavouring to lead them to the knowledge of himself, that they might obtain salvation through him: he was working a series of the most stupendous miracles in confirmation of his word: he was labouring day and night for their sakes, making it his very meat and drink to accomplish the grand ends and purposes of his mission: yet, how were his labours requited? they cavilled at his words, ascribed his miracles to Satanic influence, and rejected the counsel of God against themselves. How grievous must this have been to him, whose whole soul was bent on their salvation! This caused him frequently to groan in spirit, and even to weep in the midst of his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. But there were yet other sources of grief, more afflictive, if possible, than this. Whence arose *his agony in the garden*, when his body was bathed in a bloody sweat? Whence those "strong cryings and tears," with which he supplicated the removal of the bitter cup? Whence the heart-rending cry, which he uttered on the cross under *the hidings of his Father's face*? Surely the vials of his Father's wrath were poured out upon him; the debt which we had incurred, was exacted of him as our surety; the penalty due to sin was inflicted on his righteous soul; "the arrows of the Almighty stuck fast in him, and made his heart within him like melting wax." There was yet another thing which must of necessity greatly aggravate his sorrows; namely, his perfect *foresight of all that should come upon him*. In mercy to *us* futurity is hid from our eyes; so that, however great our calamities be, we are comforted with a hope, that our state will soon be ameliorated. He, on the contrary, saw the crisis gradually approaching, and knew the full extent of those miseries which he was about to endure. What but the most unbounded love could carry him forward under such a load as this?

To the eye of sense indeed, this unparalleled

“acquaintance with grief” would appear strange and unaccountable: but to the view of faith, it marked him as the chosen of God, the Redeemer of the world.

This subject will be yet more fully illustrated by considering,

II. The reception he met with—

One would scarcely suppose it possible, that such a person as our Lord should sojourn upon earth, and not be universally respected. His exemplary piety, his diffusive benevolence, his instructive discourses, and his blameless conduct, one would think, must conciliate the esteem of all; and that gratitude at least must bind to him many thousands, whose maladies he had healed, or whose friends he had relieved. But, to the shame of human nature be it spoken, all, whom he had benefited, seemed to have forgotten their obligations, and to vie with each other in rendering evil for good: so far from honouring him, they despised and rejected him, and even “hid their faces from him,” as not deigning to acknowledge him. There was no name so opprobrious, but they thought him deserving of it: they called him a glutton and a wine-bibber, a deceiver and demoniac. Before the high-priest they accused him of blasphemy: and before the Roman governor they charged him with treason; that so they might secure his condemnation, and have licence to treat him as an enemy both of God and man. The indignities offered him in the last hours of his life were altogether unparalleled: it was indeed the hour of Satan’s reign, and all the powers of darkness seemed to be let loose upon him. It appeared as if nothing could satiate their malice: not content to wait the issue of a legal process, they loaded him with all manner of insults and reproaches: they dragged him from one tribunal to another; they ploughed up his back with scourges, and compelled his judge to pass sentence upon him contrary to the convictions of his own conscience: they forced him, faint and macerated as he was, to bear his cross, till he even sunk under the weight; and, to complete the

whole, they crucified him between two thieves ; and continued their impious derision till the very instant of his dissolution. Nay, they were not even then satisfied ; even after he was dead, they could not refrain from shewing their hatred of him : one of the soldiers, expressing doubtless the feelings of others as well as his own, officiously thrust his spear into his side : and all the chief priests and Pharisees made application to Pilate, that he would set a guard to watch *that deceiver*, as they called him, lest his disciples should come by night and steal him away, and report that he had risen from the dead. *Thus* did the whole nation “despise and reject him.” Every other part of the creation gave testimony to him : the wild beasts in the wilderness stood in awe of him ; the fishes of the sea confessed his power ; the winds and the waves obeyed his voice ; the holy angels ministered unto him ; the very devils acknowledged his divine mission : but *men*, the men too of his own nation, the very men whom he came to redeem, rejected him ; “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”

Happy would it have been if their contempt of Christ had terminated here : but, alas ! it continued unextinguished and unabated, even after he had proved his divine mission by his resurrection from the dead, and had sent down the Holy Ghost to attest his word. They could indeed no longer vent their spleen against his person, because he was far above out of their reach ; but they beat his messengers, reviled his doctrines, and opposed to the uttermost the success of his gospel. No means were left untried : they used every species of persecution, that they might deter men from embracing his religion : they excommunicated, imprisoned, and murdered his followers : and, though God was pleased to convert a remnant of them, the bulk of the nation contradicted and blasphemed the gospel, till they had filled up the measure of their iniquities.

But must we confine this accusation to the people of that age and nation ? Alas ! where is the nation

that has not poured contempt on Christ? The Apostles and other disciples of our Lord went to every quarter of the known world, and preached Jesus as the Saviour of men: but in every place did the glad tidings meet with the same reception. Even where the word was most successful, the great majority rejected it with disdain. And how has it been received amongst *us*? Blessed be God! we are not left wholly without witness; but the generality despise and reject Christ, as much as ever the Jews did in the days of his flesh. He is not indeed exposed to their outrage; they cannot scourge and buffet him as once they did; but there are many other ways wherein they no less virulently express their contempt of him. With what pertinacity do many controvert the divinity of his person, the reality of his atonement, and the efficacy of his grace! And what is this but to deny the Lord that bought them? Again, what is more common than for persons to rely upon their own repentance and reformation for acceptance with God, instead of trusting simply in his blood and righteousness? and what is this, but to rob him of his glory, and exclude him from the office, which he came to execute? Can any thing be more contemptuous than this? Again, he has given us commandments, in obeying which we are to testify our regard to him, and to honour him in the world. But who yields to his authority? Who brings his thoughts and actions into captivity to *his* will? Is not the language of the generality at least, "We will not have this man to reign over us?" To what purpose is it to say, Lord, Lord! if we do not the things which he says? It is only to act over again the part of those who bowed the knee to him, and yet smote him on the face. Indeed, all despise him, who do not value him as they ought. If we viewed him in his real character, we should see a beauty in him for which he is to be desired; we should "behold his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father;" he would appear to us "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely;" and the language of our hearts would be, "Whom

have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." But how few are there who thus "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ!" Yet they, who do not thus regard him, have no just sense of his worth and excellence, and therefore in reality undervalue and despise him.

We cannot better IMPROVE this subject than by observing—

1. *What enmity there is in the heart of man against God!*

The Apostle of the Gentiles has told us, that "the carnal and unrenewed mind is enmity against God." This indeed is a hard saying: but we have abundant proof of the truth of it in the subject we have been considering. We have evidence enough of it in the general forgetfulness of God, and the opposition to his will which prevails in the world. But, in the instance before us, an experiment has been made; an experiment which removes all doubt, and proves indisputably, how men would treat God, if they had him in their power. God has, for the accomplishment of his own gracious purposes, condescended to clothe himself in human flesh, and to sojourn among men. He assumed nothing of the pomp and splendour of this world, that the attachment or aversion of men might the more evidently appear to arise from their discovery of his true character. He dazzled not their eyes by a full display of his Deity, but suffered the rays of it occasionally to appear, as their organs of vision were able to bear it. He admitted them so close to him, that they might easily contemplate his proper character, and form a rational judgment of his excellencies and perfections. By this he gave them an opportunity of testifying what were the dispositions of their minds towards him. And what was the result of the experiment? Did they love him, admire him, and adore him as God? Behold, they could "see no form nor comeliness in him." On the contrary, they

hated him, despised him, and crucified him as a malefactor. Nor was this owing to the violence of a few : the whole nation rose up against him, and put him to death. Now this shews us in the clearest light, what human nature is, and what enmity there is in the heart of man against God. And O ! what a humiliating thought is it, that we should be even capable of such atrocious wickedness ! If any one object, that this was done by the Jews ; and that, if God were to come down amongst *us*, he would meet with a more suitable reception ; we reply, That in whatever place he should appear, he would assuredly be treated in the same way : for indeed he does come ; he comes to us in the preaching of his Gospel : he is truly, though not visibly, amongst us ; for he has said, “ Lo ! I am with you alway, even to the end of the world : ” yet, so far from admiring his beauty, and adoring his goodness, we scarcely bestow a thought upon him ; yea, instead of seeking our happiness in him, and devoting ourselves wholly to his service, there is no possession so contemptible, but we prefer it before him, nor any lust so base, but we choose the indulgence of it rather than his favour.

Let this melancholy truth sink down into our hearts, and cause us to lothe ourselves in dust and ashes. Nor let us ever rest, till our enmity be slain, and our aversion to him be turned into reverence and love.

In contrast with this, let us next OBSERVE—

2. *What love there is in the heart of God towards man !*

Had God foreseen that his creatures would have instantly and universally adored him, we must have for ever marvelled at the love that induced him to become incarnate. But how transcendent does that love appear, when we consider that he foresaw the treatment he should meet with, and that, as he died for his very murderers, so he now invites to mercy the most contemptuous of his enemies ! Let heaven and earth stand amazed ! and let all flesh give thanks unto his holy name for ever and ever !

DCCCCLXVIII.

THE TRUE CAUSE OF OUR LORD'S SUFFERINGS.

Isai. liii. 4, 5. *Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows : yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities : the chastisement of our peace was upon him ; and with his stripes we are healed.*

WHATEVER difficulty there may be in ascertaining the precise import of some passages of Scripture, the fundamental doctrines of our religion are all so plainly revealed, that he who runs may read them. There is not any truth indeed, however strongly declared, which has not been controverted by those who exalt their own reason above the word of God. But to the humble mind, that is willing to receive instruction, and that looks to God for the teaching of his Spirit, the general doctrines of Christianity, and that of the atonement in particular, are as clear as the sun at noon-day. The wisdom of some has been so perverted, that they could not see any reference to Christ in this whole chapter. But no person that is not either blinded by prejudice, or intoxicated with the pride of human learning, can fail of applying the words of our text to him, "who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification." The prophet spake not as a matter of doubtful disputation, when he declared the cause of the Messiah's sufferings : but with the fullest confidence asserted, that "*Surely* he hath borne our griefs," yea, "he died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." In his words we may observe—

I. The apprehended cause of our Lord's sufferings—

It was a commonly received opinion, that heavy afflictions were indications of God's displeasure on account of some enormous sin.

This idea prevailed much *among the Jews*: their history abounded with instances of God's immediate interposition to punish sin ; from whence they inferred, that every signal judgment proceeded from the same

cause. It should seem that they had adopted this uncharitable mode of judging respecting those on whom the tower in Siloam fell, or whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, as though they were sinners above all others of their own nation^a. On one occasion they openly avowed this principle, ascribing the blindness of a man who had been born blind, either to some peculiar wickedness in his parents, or to some heinous crimes, which he himself had committed in a former state of existence^b. Indeed this sentiment was the foundation of all the dispute between Job and his friends: they argued on the presumption that no good man was ever left to endure very grievous trials; but that the wrath of God against hypocritical or audacious sinners would be visibly displayed in this world^c. This idea also obtained *among the heathen world*. When Paul, after his shipwreck on the island of Malta, was bitten by a viper which fastened on his hand, the inhabitants instantly exclaimed, “No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, vengeance suffereth not to live^d.”

Now this construction was put upon the sufferings of our Lord. The people saw Jesus dying under a more accumulated weight of misery than ever had been endured by man. No one since the foundation of the world had been so universally execrated, or had met with so little compassion from his fellow-creatures. They therefore concluded, that God had marked him out as an object fit to have every species and degree of cruelty exercised towards him; “they esteemed him stricken, *judicially*^e smitten of God himself.” What a shocking indignity was this! That they should not merely regard him as a sinner, but as the most atrocious sinner in the universe, who deserved to have a murderer preferred before him!

But this was both foretold by the prophets, and fully obviated by the occurrences of his life.

In two different Psalms, confessedly relating to

^a Luke xiii. 2, 4.

^b John ix. 2.

^c Job iv. 7—9.

^d Acts xxviii. 4.

^e This is the import of the words.

Christ, it was foretold that his enemies would conspire against him, and vindicate their conduct towards him from this consideration, that God himself had pointed him out by his judgments as deserving every thing that could be inflicted on him: "All that hate me whisper together against me, against me do they devise my hurt. *An evil disease, say they, cleaveth fast unto him*: and now that he lieth, let him rise up no more^f." And again, "Mine enemies speak against me, and they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together, saying, *God hath forsaken him*; persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver^g." This vile imputation on his character therefore becomes, in this view, a testimony on his behalf; since it was ordained that such indignities should be offered to the Messiah; and in this, as well as in a thousand other instances, the Scriptures were literally accomplished in him.

But God provided a further antidote to this impression in the occurrences of his life. Even while his enemies were conspiring to take away his life, our Lord appealed to them respecting his own innocence, "Which of you convinceth me of sin^h? And the very judge who pronounced the sentence of death against him, was constrained no less than three times to acknowledge publicly, that he could find no fault in himⁱ.

The supposed cause of our Lord's sufferings being thus evidently founded in misapprehension and prejudice, we shall point out,

II. The real cause—

This is stated *in general* as originating in our wretchedness and misery.

St. Matthew, quoting the first words of the text, says, that they were accomplished when our Lord healed the multitudes of those who flocked around him^k. And this was true, inasmuch as the maladies under which men groan, are the consequences of sin;

^f Ps. xli. 7, 8.

ⁱ Luke xxiii. 4, 14, 22.

^g Ps. lxxi. 10, 11. ^h John viii. 46.

^k Matt. viii. 16, 17.

and his removing of bodily disorders was emblematical of the spiritual diseases, which he also came to heal. But the evangelist must not be understood to say, that the prophecy related to nothing more than the sympathizing with the afflicted, and the healing of their disorders; for St. Peter, quoting the very same passage, declares that Jesus “bare, not our sorrows merely, but our *sins*, in his own body on the tree, and healed *them* by his stripes¹.” Hence, then, we perceive that as sin had introduced all manner of temporal, spiritual, and eternal miseries into the world, it was for the removal of *them* that Jesus submitted to all the sufferings which were inflicted on him.

But *more particularly* the prophet informs us that Jesus suffered,

1. For the expiating of our guilt—

It is certainly true, that, wherever suffering is endured by an intelligent creature, there guilt must have previously been either contracted, or imputed. The brute animals would never have felt pain, if they had not been subjected to it on account of man’s transgression^m. Now our Lord himself “knew no sin;” and yet endured infinitely more from God, from men, and from devils, than ever had been inflicted on any human being. But he had undertaken to redeem us from the curse of the broken law. He had engaged to pay the debt, which a whole world of sinners had contracted; and so to discharge it, that not one farthing should ever be exacted of those who should trust in him. Here then was the true cause of all his sufferings. Is it asked, What it was that occasioned him such diversified and unutterable torments? We answer, Men and devils were the executioners; but our sins were the meritorious cause: “He was wounded for *our transgressions*, and bruised for *our iniquities*.” There is not a sin which we have ever committed, that was not “as a sword in his bones;” and it was only by his bearing of our sins in his own body on the tree, that the guilt of them, and the curse due to

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 24.

^m Rom. viii. 20.

them, could be taken away from us. Nothing less than this sacrifice could satisfy the demands of divine justice. As for "the blood of bulls and of goats, it was not possible that they should take away sin:" nor could we remove it by any offerings we could bring: rather, therefore, than we should perish for ever, Christ laid down "his own life a ransom for us."

2. For the effecting of our peace—

God was filled with indignation against his guilty creatures: nor could he, consistently with the honour of his moral government, be reconciled to his offending people, without manifesting in some way or other, his abhorrence of their evil deeds. What then should be done? What expedient should be found for the punishing of sin, and yet saving the sinner? Behold, the Son of God himself offers to become our substitute! "On ME be their curse, O my Father: let thy sword awake against me, who am thy fellow: inflict their punishment on me, and let them go free; yea, be reconciled to them for my sake." The offer is graciously accepted; and, agreeably to the prediction before us, "the chastisement of our peace was upon him;" so that God is now reconciled to every believing penitent: he embraces the returning prodigal in his arms, and feasts him with the richest tokens of parental affection. To this agrees the testimony of the great Apostleⁿ; and it is confirmed by the happy experience of multitudes in every age.

3. For the renovating of our nature—

As sin has incensed the wrath of God, so has it disordered all the powers of man. There is not a faculty either of body or soul, which is not filled with this dire contagion, and rendered incapable of exercising its proper functions to the glory of God. But the same expedient that was devised for the expiating of our guilt, and the effecting of our peace, was also the most proper for the renovating of our nature. The blood which Jesus shed upon the cross is as a balm, which heals the disorders of our souls, and restores to

ⁿ Col. i. 20—22.

man the free and legitimate use of all his powers. This, no less than the foregoing, was a principal end of all his sufferings. Did he give his back to the smiters, so that they even “ploughed it up with scourges, and made long their furrows?” It was that “by his stripes we might be healed:” he gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works°. And it is worthy of observation, that St. Peter, quoting the text, omits all mention of other ends, and fixes upon *this alone*; “he bare our sins in his own body on the tree, *that we, being dead unto sin, might live unto righteousness*; by whose stripes ye were healed”.

It would be unpardonable, if, on such a subject as this, we did not lead you to CONSIDER,

1. What obligations we lie under to love the Lord!

If a fellow-creature should submit to excruciating torments for us, how deeply should we feel, and how gratefully acknowledge, our obligations to him! We should wonder at such a proof of affection even from the dearest friend or relative. What then shall we say to these tokens of love from one, to whom, in the whole course of our lives, we had shewn ourselves the most determined enemies? What shall we think of the Lord Jesus, leaving the bosom of his Father *on purpose* to endure these things for us; to endure all that men or devils could inflict, and all that our sins had merited? Shall we feel no grateful emotions rising in our bosom? Shall our hearts be still frozen and obdurate? O let us contemplate the wounds and bruises, the chastisements and stripes which he bare for us. Let us follow him through the whole scene of his sufferings, and say, with confidence and wonder, “*Surely*” it was all for *me*; to redeem *me* from destruction, to exalt *me* to glory. Base as human nature is, it could not long withstand the influence of such a sight: at the view of him, whom we have pierced, our unfeeling hearts would relent^a; and

° Tit. ii. 14.

p 1 Pet. ii. 24.

a Zech. xii. 10.

constrained to admire the unsearchable heights and depths of his love, we should burst forth into acclamations and hosannas, "to him who loved us and gave himself for us."

2. What obligations we lie under to put our trust in him!

What does the self-righteous Pharisee declare, but this? "I will not trust in the Lord Jesus: he was indeed wounded for my transgressions; but I despise the way of healing by his stripes; I can heal myself better by my own works; and I will rather wage eternal war with heaven, than owe my peace to the chastisement of another." Can any thing exceed the ingratitude which such a disposition involves in it? As for all the mockings and revilings of the Son of God, when he hung upon the cross, they were as nothing in comparison of this, because they were vented through an ignorance of his real character; whereas we acknowledge him as our Saviour, and yet rob him of his glory, and make his death of none effect. Let us then turn from such conduct with abhorrence: let us look to him, that we may be "justified by his blood," and experience the full efficacy of his atonement: so shall Jesus himself be "satisfied when he beholds this fruit of his travail," and we shall be distinguished monuments of his love and mercy to all eternity.

DCCCCLXIX.

THE MEANS OF MAN'S RESTORATION TO GOD.

Isai. liii. 6. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

THE lost state of man by nature, and his recovery through the blood of Christ, are the two principal doctrines of our religion. If we would ascertain the comparative importance of all other doctrines, we must judge of them by the relation which they bear to these: and consider those as most important,

which serve most to illustrate and confirm these fundamental points. Moreover, these two should always be considered in their relation to each other; for it is by the atonement that we see the depth of our depravity, and by our depravity we see the necessity and excellency of the atonement. By considering them apart, we are in danger of falling into despondency or presumption: but, by uniting our views of them, our sorrows are moderated with hope, and our confidence is tempered with humility. When God tells us, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself;" he immediately adds, "but in me is thy help." Thus also the prophet, in the words before us, first sets forth *our apostasy from God*, and then declares *the means provided for our restoration to him*. These two points we propose for our present consideration:

I. Our apostasy from God—

The comparison which the prophet institutes between us and sheep straying from their fold, forms a humiliating, but just, picture of our fallen state. Sheep are prone to stray, if not watched and restrained by the shepherd: and, when separated from the flock, they proceed farther and farther, without ever tracing back their steps to the fold. Now the whole race of mankind may be considered as a flock, whose duty and happiness it is to live under the care of the good Shepherd. They should hear his voice, and follow his steps, and feed in his pastures, and trust in him for protection. But the whole flock is scattered over the face of the earth: all have departed from the fold of God, and are wandering from him, none considering, Whence am I come? or, Whither am I going? or, How shall I find my way to God again? They reflect not on the dangers to which they are every moment exposed, nor on the infinitely greater happiness they might enjoy, if they would obey the Shepherd's voice.

What the prophet has thus illustrated by a comparison, he afterwards, as is usual in all the prophetic writings, declares in plain and express terms.

Mankind have all turned aside from God and his ways into paths of their own choosing. One has chosen the way of open *profaneness*. To follow the bent of his own carnal inclinations, to walk at liberty in the pursuit of pleasure, to join in convivial company, to be a spectator of every vain amusement, to gratify his passions with every sensual enjoyment, *this* is the happiness which he affects, nor does he desire any other heaven than this: could he but ensure a continuance of these delights, with health and vigour to enjoy them, he would attain the very summit of his ambition. Another prefers the way of *worldliness*. He has not any great taste for what are called the pleasures of life: he desires rather the more retired comforts of a family; to provide for whom employs all his solicitude. In prosecution of his plans for their support, he engages with assiduity in his daily work: "he rises up early, and late takes rest, and eats the bread of carefulness;" and looks for all his recompence in beholding the increase of his fortune, and the advancement of his dependents. Every thing is made subservient to the promotion of his temporal interests; nor has he a wish or thought beyond them.

Another, scorning perhaps the sordid vices of the sensualist, and elevated, by means of easy circumstances, above the cares of the worldling, or desirous perhaps to compensate for the irregularities of his former life, chooses the less beaten track of religious *formality*. He wishes to be regarded as a person of correct manners, and of virtuous conduct. To set an example to those around him, and to be proposed as a pattern to the rising generation, is a far higher gratification to him, than to riot in dissipation, or to amass riches. With these views he is attentive to all the external duties of religion: his prayers, such as they are, are regularly performed in the Church, the family, and the closet. A portion of the Scriptures is read at stated seasons: his servants are instructed: his children are catechized: and his hand is stretched out to relieve the poor and needy. In short, nothing is omitted that may elevate him in the eyes of others,

and serve as a foundation for self-complacency. *This* he supposes to be God's way, when, in fact, it is, as much as either the worldling's or the sensualist's, a way of his own : for, in all this, there is nothing of brokenness of heart and contrition, nothing of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing of devotedness to the glory of God : and, in proof that this is their own way, and not God's, it may be observed, that they will proceed no farther than will consist with their own humour, and reputation in the world : whereas, if they really intended to do God's will, they would do it in every thing, without any regard to consequences, or any secret reserves.

We mean not to say that there is no difference with respect to these ways ; for certainly a state of formality is incomparably better than either worldliness or profaneness ; but they are all evidences of our apostasy from God ; and any one of them will expose us to his just and heavy displeasure.

That such is indeed the state of man, is abundantly confirmed by other passages of holy writ. St. Paul proves it by a variety of citations collected together ; and infers from it, that " every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." St. Peter quotes the very words of the text as applicable to every individual saint before his conversion to Christ. And we are all taught to adopt them for our own use, when we say in our Liturgy, " We have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep ; we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts."

Well might we have been left to wander till we had fallen a prey to the roaring lion that seeketh to devour us. But God, in compassion to our souls, has sent his only dear Son to seek us out, and to be,

II. The means of our restoration to him—

We are apt to imagine, that, if we have not committed any gross sin, we have no reason to apprehend the divine displeasure. But we should recollect that
A STATE OF APOSTASY FROM GOD IS THE ROOT AND SUMMIT

OF ALL SIN. The poor senseless sheep may be pitied, but cannot be blamed, for wandering from the fold, because they are unconscious of any obligation to abide under the direction of their shepherd. But our criminality in departing from God is exceeding great. Blind as we are to spiritual truths, we yet know that there is a God, whom we ought to love and serve. We know that, to live without him in the world, or to serve him only with our lips while our hearts are far from him, is an insult to his majesty, and a violation of his commands. Yet these are the ways which we have chosen for ourselves in preference to those, which he has marked out for us in his word. What need we more to criminate us in his sight? What need we more to draw down upon ourselves his wrath and indignation? The particular acts of sin which any commit, are only so many branches proceeding from this root, and so many ways of manifesting our aversion to him. There may indeed be degrees of guilt in respect of them; but in respect to the general *habit of our minds*, we are all alike; we are wilful, deliberate, and determined apostates from God: we have cast off our allegiance to him: we have made our own will the rule, and our own honour or interest the end, of all our actions: we have lived to ourselves, and not unto him: in a word, we have, as far as depended on us, banished God from the universe, and been a God unto ourselves. *This* is "the iniquity of us all."

What might have been expected, but that God should abandon such an impious race, and give them over to everlasting destruction? yet behold, instead of leaving us to ourselves, he provided a way for our restoration to his favour. He took, not merely our particular transgressions, but the whole mass of iniquity, that had accumulated from the beginning to the end of time, and laid it on his Son. As all the iniquities of all the children of Israel were transferred to the scape-goat under the law, that he might bear them away into a land of oblivion, so were all the sins of the whole human race transferred to Christ, that,

having borne the curse due to them, he might take them all away from us for ever. This was the plan, which infinite wisdom contrived for the pardoning of sin in consistency with the divine perfections. Had the Governor of the universe received his apostate creatures to favour without any atonement, it might have appeared a light matter to transgress against him; and he himself might have seemed indifferent about the rights of justice, and the honour of his government. But, by providing such a substitute, he at once discovered his abhorrence of iniquity, and shewed himself just, while he should justify those that believe in Jesus. Doubtless this was done with the consent and concurrence of his Son; for otherwise it had been an act of injustice to *him*: but it was nevertheless a fruit of the Father's love, and an expedient devised by him for the salvation of a ruined world; an expedient never sufficiently to be admired, the theme of men and angels to all eternity.

How this operates to counteract our apostasy may easily be seen. In the state of man two things were to be remedied, the guilt of his departure, and his propensity to depart: and the same remedy was found effectual for both. By the death of Jesus in our stead, our guilt is cancelled, and justice itself is satisfied on our behalf. Moreover the gift of the Holy Spirit is procured for us, that by his operations, our nature may be changed, and we may be brought to delight as much in the ways of God as ever we delighted in the ways of sin. It is true, the very best of men have within them still a proneness to wander; and, if left to themselves, they would yet again depart from their good shepherd: but this is not their wish, as once it was; nor can they for a single day be absent from him without pain and sorrow, yea, without a determination instantly to return to him, and to watch more carefully against the beginnings of declension from him. St. Peter himself tells us, that, as this was the intent of our Saviour's death, so it is also its uniform effect: "he bare our sins in his own body on the tree:" do we ask for what end he bare

them ? it was, “ that we, being dead unto sin, might live unto righteousness.” The apostle then adds, “ By whose stripes ye were healed.” Do we enquire, wherein this healing consists ? he tells us ; “ For ye were as sheep going astray ; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls^a.”

In order that we may make a suitable IMPROVEMENT of this subject, let us,

1. *Adopt the confession of the prophet—*

How justly he represents our fallen state, is but too evident both from Scripture and experience. We say not that all have lived in open immoralities, or, that all have despised the ordinances of religion. God forbid. There doubtless are many, who, in their outward deportment both towards God and man, have been comparatively blameless, yea, exceeding amiable and praise-worthy. But we must recur to the former accusation, and comprehend all under the awful character of apostates from God. And is there one amongst us that will presume to deny the charge ? Did the prophet include himself in the accusation, and shall we plead innocence ? Did St. Paul say, respecting himself and all the other Apostles, that they all had been “ once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures,” and shall we exalt ourselves above them ? Let us rather beg of God to shew us the depth of our depravity, and to humble us in the dust under a sense of our departure from him. And let us not rest in *general* confessions, saying, “ *All* we have gone astray ;” but let “ *every one*” of us search out the particular way to which we have turned, and go to God, saying, Thus and thus have *I* done. This must of necessity precede our return to God ; or rather, it is the first step of our return. But, if we be too proud to acknowledge our apostasy, if we yet remain ignorant of our guilt and danger, let us not wonder, if we be left to depart from him, till our separation become irreparable and eternal.

^a 1 Pet. ii. 24, 25.

2. Having adopted from our hearts the confession of the prophet, let us proceed to *imitate the conduct of our God*—

Behold what the Father did, when no other way remained for our restoration to his favour: he took all our iniquities, and laid them on the head of his own Son. Thus must we also do, if we would have them removed from our own souls. We must come, not with a few of our most heinous sins, but with all, with the entire guilt of our apostasy from God; and, as guilty and self-ruined creatures, without help or hope in ourselves, must lay them on the head of Jesus: we must not account any so great, as to doubt whether we may transfer them to him, or any so small, as to think we can atone for them ourselves; we must carry all to him, that we may be “justified by his blood, and be saved from wrath through him.” We must resemble the penitent under the law, who, while he presented his offering that was to be sacrificed in his stead, laid his hands upon its head, and confessed over it his sins. Let us only be like-minded with God in this particular, and lay our iniquities on his dear Son, and we have nothing to fear. Our past transgressions shall be forgiven; and our present propensities shall be healed: we shall be brought home on the shoulders of our exulting Shepherd, and shall lie down beside the clear streams, till called to follow him to his pastures above, where we shall be “one fold under one Shepherd” for evermore.

DCCCCLXX.

CHRIST'S BEHAVIOUR UNDER HIS SUFFERINGS.

Isai. liii. 7. *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*

THE preaching of Christ crucified has in every age been the great means of converting men to God: nor is there any passage of Scripture, which may not, by

a judicious exposition of it, be improved either for leading us to Christ, or for instructing us how to honour him in the world. But it is scarcely possible for any one to read the chapter before us, without having his thoughts led to Christ in every part of it. It is rather like a history than a prophecy, since every thing relating to him is so circumstantially described, and, instead of being enveloped in obscurity, is declared with the utmost plainness and perspicuity. The portion of it selected for our present consideration was signally honoured of God to the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, who, on his return from Jerusalem, was reading it in his chariot : God sent his servant Philip to unfold to him the mysteries contained in it: and Philip, having at his request seated himself in the chariot with him, “began at the same Scripture and preached unto him Jesus^a.” May the same divine energy accompany our ministrations, while we lead your attention to that adorable Saviour, and point out to you both *his sufferings*, and *his behaviour under them!*

I. Let us contemplate the sufferings of Jesus—

At the first view of this passage we should be led to expatiate upon the greatness of our Redeemer's sufferings: but there is a very important idea contained in it, which, though obscurely intimated in our translation, might with propriety be more strongly expressed: the prophet informs us that Jesus was to be afflicted in an oppressive manner, as a man is, who, having become a surety for another, is dragged to prison for his debts. This sense of the words would more clearly appear, if we were to translate them thus; “It was exacted, and he was made answerable^b.”

Agreeably to this idea, instead of dwelling on the intensity of his sufferings, we shall rather speak of them as vicarious.

We, by sin, had incurred a debt, which not all the men on earth or angels in heaven were able to discharge. In consequence of this, we must all have

^a Acts viii. 27, 28, 32, 35.

^b Bishop Lowth.

been consigned over to everlasting perdition, if Jesus had not engaged on our behalf to satisfy every demand of law and justice. When he saw that there was none able or willing to avert from us the miseries to which we were exposed, "his own arm brought salvation to us^c." As Paul, interposing for the restoration of Onesimus to the favour of his master whom he had robbed, said, "If he hath robbed thee, or oweth thee aught, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it," so did our Lord, as it were, address his Father on our behalf; that a full compensation being made for our iniquities, we might be restored to the divine favour.

Jesus having thus become our surety, our debt "was exacted of him, and he was made answerable" for it. The demands of justice could not be relaxed. However desirous the Father himself was that man should be spared, the honour of his government absolutely required that the violations of his law should be punished. On whomsoever guilt should be found, whether on the principal or the surety, it must be marked as an object of God's utter abhorrence. Not even his only dear Son, if he should stand in the place of sinners, could be exempt from the penalty due to sin. Hence, when the time was come, in which Jesus was to fulfil the obligations he had contracted, he was required to pay the debt of all, for whom he had engaged; and to pay it to the very utmost farthing.

It was by his sufferings that he discharged this debt. Let us only call to mind the sentence originally denounced against sin, and we shall see that he endured it in all its parts. Were our bodies and our souls doomed to inconceivable misery? He sustained, both in body and soul, all that men or devils could inflict upon him. Was shame to be a consequence of transgression? Never was a human being loaded with such ignominy as he; "the very objects mocking him incessantly, and gnashing upon him with their teeth^d." Were we to be banished from the presence of God, and to have a sense of his wrath in our souls?

^c Isai. lix. 16.

^d Ps. xxxv. 15, 16.

Behold, Jesus was "bruised by the Father" himself; and experienced such bitter agonies of soul, that the blood issued from every pore of his body; and he who had sustained in silence all that man was able to inflict, cried out by reason of the darkness of his soul, and the inexpressible torment that he suffered under the hidings of his Father's face. Were we subjected to a curse? He was, by the special providence of God, doomed to a death, which had long before been declared accursed; and was given up into the hands of the Romans, in order that he might, in the strictest sense, "be made a curse for us^e." Finally, had the decree gone forth, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die?" He filled up the measure of his sufferings by death, and effected our deliverance by "giving his own life a ransom for us." It may be said indeed, that we had deserved eternal misery; whereas that which he endured was but for a time. This is true; nevertheless there was no defect in his payment; because his temporary sufferings were equivalent to the eternal sufferings of all the human race; equivalent, as far as related to the ends for which they were inflicted, to the honour of the divine perfections, and the equity of God's moral government. Indeed, the value of his sufferings infinitely surpassed all that ever could have been endured by man: if the whole world of sinners had been suffering for millions of ages, the demands of the law would never have been satisfied; eternity itself must have been the duration of their torments: but the dignity of Christ's nature, as God over all, stamped an infinite worth on all that he did and suffered. Hence his death was a full, perfect, and sufficient propitiation for the sins of the whole world: in the hour of his death he "blotted out the handwriting that was against us, nailing it to his cross." Thus was our debt wholly cancelled; and "there now remains no condemnation to them that believe in him."

Having this glorious end in view, he exhibited,

^e Crucifixion was not a Jewish, but a Roman punishment.

throughout the whole of his sufferings, the most wonderful magnanimity in,

II. His behaviour under them—

Nothing can exceed the beauty and propriety of the images, by which our Lord's patience is here illustrated. As a sheep, when the shearer is stripping it of its clothing, makes neither noise, nor resistance; and as a lamb sports about even while being driven to the slaughter, yea, and licks the very hand that is lifted up to slay it, so our blessed Lord endured all his sufferings *silently, willingly, and with expressions of love to his very murderers.*

Twice is *his silence* noticed in the text, because it indicated a self-government, which, under his circumstances, no created being could have exercised. The most eminent saints have opened their mouths in complaints both against God and man. Job, that distinguished pattern of patience, even cursed the day of his birth. Moses, the meekest of the sons of men, who had withstood numberless provocations, yet, at last, spake so unadvisedly with his lips, that he was excluded, on account of it, from the earthly Canaan. And even the Apostle Paul, than whom no human being ever attained a higher eminence in any grace, broke forth into "revilings against God's high-priest," who had ordered him to be smitten contrary to the law. But "there was no guile in the lips of Jesus;" nor did he ever once open his mouth in a sinful or unbecoming manner. On one occasion indeed he expostulates with his God and Father, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" But herein he did not express the smallest degree of impatience, or of murmuring against God. As a *man*, he could not but feel, and as a *good man*, he could not but bewail, the loss of the divine presence; and in this complaint he has shewn us the intenseness of his own sufferings, and the manner in which every good man *ought* to plead with God in an hour of distress and trouble. Nor did he ever utter any vindictive threatenings against his enemies. He foretold indeed the

destruction which they would bring upon themselves when they should have filled up the measure of their iniquities: but this he did with tears and sorrow of heart, not to intimidate them, but to express his affection for them. His silence before the tribunal of Pilate was not a stubborn or scornful silence, but a meek and dignified resignation of himself to the will of his blood-thirsty enemies. How easily could he have retorted all their charges upon them, and put both his judge and his accusers to shame! But his time was come; and he would not but that all the prophecies should be accomplished in him. Moreover, when he was smitten unjustly before the very seat of justice, he made no other reply than this; "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?" Thus, in the midst of all the cruelties and indignities that could be offered him, he never once uttered an angry, a vindictive, or an unadvised word.

Indeed there was not only a submission, but a perfect *willingness*, on his part, to bear all that he was called to suffer. When first he became our surety, and it was proposed to him to assume our nature for that purpose, he replied, "Lo, I come, I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart^f." When Peter would have dissuaded him from subjecting himself to the miseries which were coming upon him, our Lord rebuked him with a just severity, as the very first-born of Satan; since none could more effectually do the part of Satan, than he, who should attempt to divert him from his purpose of suffering in the place of sinners. "With great earnestness did he desire to eat the last passover with his disciples," and "to be baptized with his bloody baptism;" yea, and "was greatly straitened till it should be accomplished." He might easily have escaped, when Judas with a band of soldiers came to apprehend him in the garden; but, notwithstanding "he knew all things that were coming upon him," he voluntarily went up to them, and asked them, whom they sought:

^f Ps. xl. 6—8.

and, after he had shewn them by one exercise of his power that he could easily have struck them all dead upon the spot, even as Elijah had done before him^g, he gave himself up into their hands, stipulating however for his disciples (as he had long since done *in effect* with his heavenly Father for *us*), “If ye seek *me*, let *these* go their way.” At the time of his death also, to convince the people that his nature was not exhausted, he with an exceeding loud voice committed his spirit into his Father’s hands, shewing thereby, that no man took his life from him, but that he laid it down of himself: and the evangelist particularly marked this by saying, “He yielded up,” or, as the word means, he “*dismissed* his spirit^h.”

In the midst of all his sufferings he abounded in *expressions of love* to his very murderers. When he came within sight of that infatuated, that malignant city, instead of feeling any resentment, he wept over it, and pathetically lamented the invincible obstinacy which would shortly involve it in utter ruin. Many, even thousands of its blood-thirsty inhabitants, were interested in that intercessory prayer, which he offered on the very eve of his crucifixion; the blessed effects of which were fully manifested on the day of Pentecost. While he yet hanged on the cross, instead of accusing them to his Father, he prayed for them, and even pleaded their ignorance in extenuation of their guilt; “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” And after he had risen triumphant from the grave, he still manifested the same unbounded compassion, directing his disciples to make the offers of salvation *first* to that very people, who had treated him with such consummate crueltyⁱ; and to assure them, that the blood which they had shed was ready to cleanse them from the guilt of shedding it.

Such was the behaviour of our blessed Lord, every way suited to his august character, and calculated to promote the great ends of his mission: for while, by

^g John xviii. 6.

^h Matt. xxvii. 50. Ἀφῆκε τὸ πνεῦμα.

ⁱ Luke xxiv. 47.

his sufferings, he paid the penalty that was due from us, and thus “finished transgression, and made an end of sin,” he fulfilled also the obedience which the law required, and “brought in for sinners an everlasting righteousness^k.”

THIS SUBJECT, replete with wonder, affords us,

1. *An occasion for thankfulness—*

Let us for a moment endeavour to realize our state before God. We have sinned against him : we have multiplied our transgressions : they are more in number than the stars of heaven, or the sands upon the sea shore. We owe to God a debt of ten thousand talents ; and are unable to pay the least farthing towards it. What if we exert ourselves to serve God better in future ? If we could live as angels in future, we could make no satisfaction for our past transgressions : the not continuing to increase our debt would not discharge the debt already incurred. But we cannot help adding to the score every day we live. What then should we do, if we had not a surety ? Where should we hide ourselves from our creditor ? How should we contrive to elude his search, or to withstand his power ? Alas ! our case would be pitiable indeed. But adored be the name of our God, who has “laid help upon One that is mighty !” Adored be that Jesus, who undertook to pay the price of our redemption, and who says, “Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom^l.”

To view our situation aright let us consider ourselves, like Isaac, already devoted to death, and the arm of God himself uplifted to inflict the fatal stroke. When there seemed no prospect whatever of deliverance, mercy interposed to avert the impending ruin : and Jesus, like the ram caught in the thicket, offered himself in our stead^m. And shall we be insensible to all his love ? Will not “the very stones cry out against us, if we should hold our peace ?” O then “let them give thanks, whom the Lord hath

^k Dan. ix. 24.

^l Job xxxiii. 24.

^m Gen. xxii. 13.

redeemed, and delivered from the hand of the enemy."

But this SUBJECT affords us also,

2. *A pattern for our imitation—*

The delivering of us from destruction was by no means the only end of our Saviour's suffering: he further intended to "leave us an example, that we should follow his steps;" that as he, "when reviled, reviled not again, and when he suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously; so we and all his disciples, should walk according to the same rule." And how excellent is such a disposition! how incomparably more glorious does Jesus appear, when "giving his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and when he hid not his face from shame and spitting," than any of the heroes of antiquity riding in their triumphal car, and dragging captive princes at their chariot wheels! If then we would be truly great, let our first victory be over our own spirit. Let us "possess our souls in patience," that, "patience having its perfect work, we may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." "If our enemy hunger, let us feed him; if he thirst, let us give him drink; that by so doing we may heap coals of fire on his head," not to consume him, but to melt him into love. Let us "not be overcome of evil, but overcome evil with goodⁿ." Difficult, no doubt, this conduct is: but can we want an inducement to it, when we reflect how Christ has loved us, and given himself for us? Should we think it much to forgive our fellow-servant a few pence, when we have been forgiven ten thousand talents? Let us remember that all our professions of faith, if we be destitute of this love, are vain and worthless. "If we could speak with the tongues of men and angels, or had faith to remove mountains," or zeal to endure martyrdom, yet if we wanted the ornament of a meek, patient, and forgiving spirit, we should be "only as sounding brass, or as tinkling

ⁿ Rom. xii. 20, 21.

cymbals." God has warned us, that, as the master seized his unforgiving servant, and cast him into "prison till he should pay the utmost farthing;" "so will HE also do unto us, if we forgive not from our hearts every one his brother their trespasses." Let us then set Christ before our eyes: let us learn of him to forgive, not once, or seven times, but seventy times seven; or, to use the language of the Apostle, let us "be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us^p."

^o Matt. xviii. 35.

^p Eph. iv. 32.

DCCCCLXXI.

OUR LORD'S TRIAL AND EXECUTION.

Isai. liii. 8. *He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.*

IT has been generally thought, especially among heathen writers, that if virtue could be set before the eyes of men, and exhibited by some pattern of perfect excellence, it would conciliate the esteem of all, and be held in universal admiration. But Socrates entertained a very different opinion: he thought that if any person possessed of perfect virtue were to appear in the world, his conduct would form so striking a contrast to that of all around him, that he would be hated, despised, and persecuted, and at last be put to death; because the world could not endure the tacit, but keen reproofs, which such an example must continually administer. Experience proves that the opinion of this great philosopher was founded in a just estimate of human nature. Such a light did come into the world: "it shined in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not:" the workers of iniquity hated the light, and endeavoured to extinguish it, though their malicious attempts served but to make it burn with brighter lustre. The Lord

Jesus was none other than virtue itself incarnate; and his enemies abundantly justified the opinion of Socrates; for they combined against him, and treated him with unexampled cruelty, and slew him. The extreme injustice of their conduct towards him is strongly marked in the words before us; which, on account of their intricacy, we shall *explain*, and, as replete with useful instruction, we shall *improve*.

I. To explain them—

Commentators have differed much in their interpretation of the former clauses of the text; some referring them to the exaltation of Christ, and others to his humiliation. According to the former, they import that God would raise him from the dead, and give him an inexpressible weight of glory, together with an innumerable seed, who should, as it were, be born to him. But we very much prefer the interpretation that refers them to the trial and execution of our Lord: for, in this view, they form an evident connexion between his behaviour under the indignities offered him^a, and his burial in the grave of a rich man^b. A learned prelate^c translates them thus; “He was taken off by an oppressive judgment; and his manner of life who would declare?” According to this view of the words, they particularly specify the injustice, which, under a legal form, should be exercised towards him, and the want of that, which was, in every court of justice, the privilege of prisoners, the liberty of calling witnesses to testify on his behalf. Our Lord himself refers to that custom in his answer to the high-priest^d; “I spake openly to the world: and in secret have I said nothing: why askest thou me? *Ask them which heard me*, what I have said to them: behold, they know what I said.” St. Paul also, when before Festus and Agrippa, complained that his adversaries withheld from him the testimony, which their knowledge of him qualified them to give: “My manner of life from my youth know all the Jews, who knew me

^a ver. 7. ^b ver. 9. ^c Bishop Lowth. ^d John xviii. 20, 21.

from the beginning (*if they would testify*) that after the straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee^e." A further confirmation of this sense of the words arises from the manner in which they are cited by an inspired writer: St. Luke, quoting the very passage before us, says, "In his humiliation his judgment was taken away;" and, "who shall declare his generation^f?" Now though the latter words are the same as in the text, yet the former vary considerably from it; and seem to determine this to be the true scope of the whole; namely, that the most common rights of justice should be denied to our Lord at the time of his trial.

The history of our Lord is but too just a comment on this prophecy: for surely there never was a person treated with such flagrant injustice as he. His enemies, unable to lay any thing to his charge, suborned false witnesses, that they might take away his life by perjury: and when these agreed not in their testimony, they laid hold of an expression used by him some years before, and put a different construction upon it from what he ever intended, in order to found on *that* a ground of accusation against him. They dragged him from one tribunal to another in hopes of obtaining sentence against him: and when the governor, after repeated examinations, declared that he could find no fault in him, they would not suffer him to pass such a sentence as law and equity demanded, but in a tumultuous and threatening manner, compelled him to deliver him up into their hands, and to sanction their cruelties by his official mandate. The particular injustice, which we are more immediately called to notice, was, that *they never once summoned any witnesses to speak on his behalf*. If they had permitted the herald, as on other occasions, to invite all who knew the prisoner to give testimony to his character, how many thousands could have disproved the accusations of his enemies, and established his reputation on the firmest basis! What multitudes could have affirmed, that, instead

^e Acts xxvi. 4, 5.

^f Acts viii. 33.

of usurping the prerogatives of Cæsar, he had miraculously withdrawn himself from the people, when they sought to invest him with royal authority: and had charged them to be as conscientious in giving to Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's, as unto God the things that were God's! And while these invalidated the charges of treason and sedition, how many myriads could have borne witness to his transcendent goodness! How might they have said, "I was *blind*, and he gave me sight; I was *deaf*, and he unstopped my ears; I was *dumb*, and he loosed my tongue; I was *lame*, and he invigorated my limbs; I was *sick*, and he restored me to health; I was *possessed with devils*, and he delivered me from their power; I was *dead*, and he raised me to life again." Possibly some might have been found, who had not lost all remembrance of his kindness, provided they had been suffered to speak on his behalf: but, as on a former occasion, the chief priests had excommunicated the blind man for arguing in his defence^g, so now did they intimidate all, insomuch that none dared to open their lips in his favour. Even his own disciple, who had promised the most faithful adherence to his cause, forsook him in this extremity, and, through fear of their threatened vengeance, denied, with oaths and curses, that he even knew the man.

Having prevailed by dint of clamour, the Jews led him forth to execution, that he might be "cut off out of the land of the living." But no Jewish punishment was sufficiently cruel to satiate their malice: they therefore, notwithstanding their rooted hatred of a foreign yoke, voluntarily acknowledged their subjection to the Romans, that they might be gratified with seeing him die by the most lingering, painful, and ignominious of all deaths, a death which none but slaves were ever suffered to endure.

Who that had seen the universal and invincible determination of the Jewish people to destroy him, must not have concluded, that he was one whose unparalleled iniquities had excited their just abhorrence?

^g John ix. 22, 34.

Who, on being told that there was not one found upon the face of the whole earth to speak a word on his behalf, must not have been persuaded that he suffered for *his own* transgressions? But though the testimony of man was not *formally* and *audibly* given at the bar of judgment, there was abundant proof, that he suffered, not for his own sins, but for ours. There was a remarkable concurrence of circumstances to establish his innocence, not only in spite of their efforts to prove him guilty, but, in a great measure, arising from them. The endeavours of the chief priests to bring *false* witnesses, clearly shewed that they had no *just* ground of accusation against him. Had any person been able to impute evil to him, it is most probable that Judas would have done it, and would have brought it forth in vindication of his own conduct: but he, so far from justifying his own treachery, restored to the chief priests the wages of iniquity, affirming that he had betrayed *innocent* blood: and they, unable to contradict him, tacitly acknowledged the truth of his assertion, bidding *him* look to *that* as *his* concern. Pilate not only declared repeatedly that he could find no fault in him, but that neither was Herod able to lay any thing to his charge. He even came forth before them all, and washed his hands, in token that the guilt of condemning that *just* person should lie on those who had demanded his execution, and not on him who had reluctantly consented to it. The thief upon the cross, reproving his contemptuous companion, attested the innocence of Jesus, saying, "We indeed suffer justly; but this man hath done nothing amiss." If *he* be thought an incompetent witness, because he spake not from his own knowledge; we affirm that his testimony was so much the stronger, because it was founded on common report, and therefore was not the testimony of a mere individual, but of the Jews in general. To these we may add the testimony of the Centurion, who had been stationed to superintend the execution. He had seen the dying behaviour of this persecuted man; he had seen that, immediately

before his death, he had cried with a loud voice, manifesting thereby that he willingly surrendered up his soul, while his body was yet strong and vigorous: he had been witness to that supernatural darkness during the three last hours of our Saviour's life; he had felt the earthquake at the moment of his departure from the body; and by these, as well as other circumstances, he was convinced of Jesus' innocence, and exclaimed in the hearing of the people, "Truly this was a just man, this was the Son of God." Thus evident was it in the midst of all the obloquy that was cast on Jesus, that he was not stricken for any transgressions of his own.

Our iniquities were the true occasion of all the calamities that he endured. How far, and to what extent, he may be said to have suffered for the transgressions of those who shall never be numbered amongst "God's people," is a point not easy to determine, nor at all necessary to inquire into. In some sense it is undeniable, he died for *all*, and was "a propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world:" and if it be asked, who brought him from heaven? who betrayed, condemned and crucified him? we answer, *WE*: the Jews and Romans were the *instruments*, but "our transgressions" were the true and only *cause*, of all his sufferings. Nor can the importance of this truth be more strongly marked than by the frequent repetition of it in this short chapter. Indeed, if this be not borne in mind, we may be affected with the recital of his history, as we should be with the history of Joseph, or any other pathetic story; but we shall be for ever destitute of those benefits, which his vicarious sufferings were intended to impart.

Having explained the words before us, we shall endeavour,

II. To improve them—

We may well learn from them, in the first place, to *guard against the effects of popular prejudice and clamour—*

Never was the power of prejudice so awfully manifest as on this occasion. The chief priests and rulers had only to raise an outcry against Jesus, and the unthinking populace adopted their views, and carried into effect their most inhuman purposes. It was quite sufficient to stigmatize Jesus with some opprobrious name, and all his virtues were obscured, all his benevolent actions were forgotten; and the common forms of justice were superseded for his readier condemnation. Thus it is also at this day with respect to his Gospel. We profess indeed, as Christians, to reverence the name of Christ; but there is precisely the same hatred to his Gospel in the hearts of carnal men, as there was to his person in the hearts of those who nailed him to the cross. His followers are now, no less than in former ages, “a sect every where spoken against.” Some name of reproach is given them; and *that* is sufficient to put every one on his guard against them, and to render them objects of general scorn and contempt. Their sentiments are misrepresented; opinions and practices are imputed to them without any just foundation; nor can any innocence of conduct, any excellence of character, any exertions of benevolence secure them a candid and impartial judgment. We easily see what *ought* to have been the conduct of the Jews, before they proceeded to inflict such miseries on our adorable Saviour: they should have compared his character with the prophetic writings; and examined the evidences he adduced in support of his pretensions. Had they done this, they would never have “crucified the Lord of glory.” Thus should we also do with respect to his Gospel. Instead of condemning it unheard, we should give it an attentive and patient hearing. We should then bring what we hear to the touchstone of divine truth, and, by comparing it with the sacred oracles, endeavour to ascertain how far it is worthy of our belief. Such conduct would be reasonable, even if the Gospel affected our happiness only in this present life: but when we consider that our everlasting salvation also depends on our

acceptance of it, surely we must be inexcusable indeed if we will not bestow this attention on a concern of such infinite importance. On the other hand, if, like the Bereans, we search the Scriptures daily, to see whether things be as they are represented to us, we doubt not respecting the issue of such an inquiry; we shall soon believe the Gospel, and enjoy its richest blessings. Let us not then suffer our judgment to be warped by prejudice, or our inquiries to be stopped by popular clamour. If any people be objects of general odium on account of their religious sentiments and conduct, let us not hastily conclude that they are wrong; lest peradventure we “be found fighting against God,” and “reject the counsel of God against ourselves.” The opposition made to them may perhaps be rather considered as a presumption in their favour; because the true religion, and its most strenuous advocates, have in every age been maligned and opposed. The just medium is, neither to reject nor receive any thing without a diligent and impartial examination; but “to prove all things, and hold fast that which is good^h.”

This subject may further teach us,

2. *To expect injuries from the hands of an ungodly world.*

The Scripture has plainly told us that we must suffer with Christ in order that we may reign with him. Nor did our Lord conceal this truth from his followers: on the contrary, he was peculiarly solicitous that they should bear it in mind; “Remember,” says he, “the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord: if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute youⁱ.” It is certain, therefore, that we must be conformed to our Saviour’s image, and, like him, be made perfect through sufferings. If we think to resemble him in holiness, and yet to escape the cross, we shall find ourselves disappointed in the issue. We must either violate our conscience by sinful compliances, or bear reproach on account of our singularity. We may indeed, by a long course of

^h 1 Thess. v. 21.

ⁱ John xv. 20.

exemplary conduct, put to silence the ignorance of foolish men^k: but our fortitude will be tried; nor can we hope that God will make our enemies to be at peace with us, till our ways have long been pleasing in his sight, and our fidelity have been proved by many painful and victorious conflicts. It is worthy of observation, that St. Peter makes this very improvement of our Lord's sufferings: "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, *arm yourselves likewise with the same mind*^l." He goes further still; and bids us "not think it strange if we should be tried with fiery trials, as though some strange thing happened unto us; but rather to rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that, when his glory shall be revealed, we may be glad also with exceeding joy." Let us then take up our cross daily, and follow Christ. Let no fear of man deter us from a conscientious discharge of our duty. Let us "remember him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest we be weary and faint in our minds." And if we have reason to expect, that, like him, we shall even be "cut off out of the land of the living" for our adherence to the truth, let us cheerfully "suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together."

There is yet one more improvement which, above all, it behoves us to make of this subject — — — It powerfully speaks to all of us this salutary admonition,

3. *Let that be a source of grief to you, which was an occasion of such misery to Christ—*

Can we recollect that every transgression of ours inflicted a wound on the sacred body of our Lord, yea, and caused the deepest agony in his soul, and yet review our past lives with indifference? Shall not rather the experience of every day fill us with shame and contrition? And shall not sin appear so hateful in our eyes, that we shall henceforth turn away from it with indignation and abhorrence? We are informed that David, when three of his worthies

^k 1 Pet. ii. 15

^l 1 Pet. iv. 1, 12, 13.

had cut their way through the Philistine hosts, and, at the most imminent peril of their lives, had brought him water from the well of Bethlehem, forbore to drink of it, and poured it out before the Lord with this reflection; “Is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives^m?” However much he had thirsted for it, he was deterred by this consideration from even tasting it. And shall not we, when tempted to gratify any unhallowed appetite, call to mind what it cost our Lord to redeem us from it? However strong may be our thirst for sin, shall not the remembrance of our having so often drank it with greediness abase us in the dust? And shall we not in future put away the cup from our lips, saying, ‘This is the blood, not of a mere *man* who *jeopardied* his life, but of *God’s only Son*, who actually *died* for me? Was he crucified for me once, and shall I now crucify him afresh? Did he shed his precious blood for me, and shall I tread him under foot, and count his blood an unholy thing? How shall I do such wickedness, and sin thus against my God and Saviour?’ This were indeed a good improvement of the subject before us: this were to answer the great end of all Christ’s sufferings; since “he gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.” This too beyond all things would evince us to be the very “people of God, for whose transgressions he was stricken.” Let this effect then be visible amongst us. So, when we ourselves shall stand at the tribunal of our Lord, our lives shall testify on our behalf; and the judge of quick and dead shall say, “I know that ye feared me, seeing that ye put away from you the accursed thing, which my soul hated.”

^m 2 Sam. xxiii. 15—17.

DCCCCLXXII.

THE FATHER’S CONDUCT TOWARDS THE INNOCENT JESUS
EXPLAINED AND VINDICATED.

Isai. liii. 9, 10. *He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence,*

neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief.

THE accomplishment of the prophecies is one of the strongest arguments for the truth of Christianity. The predictions which relate to the great Founder of our religion are so numerous and so minute, that they could not possibly have been dictated by any but *Him*, to whom all things are naked and open, and who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. The very smallest circumstances of our Lord's death, even such as were most *unlikely* and *insignificant*, were pointed out with as much accuracy as those which were most important. What could be more *unlikely*, than that he should be crucified, when crucifixion was not a Jewish but a Roman punishment? and yet that was foretold by David hundreds of years before Rome was built. What could be more unlikely than that, if he were crucified, he should not have his legs broken, when *that* was the customary way of hastening the end of those who were crucified, and they who were crucified with him were actually so treated? yet it was foretold fifteen hundred years before, that "a bone of him should not be broken." What more *insignificant*, than that the soldiers should part his garment, but cast lots for his vesture? yet *that*, with many other things equally minute, was circumstantially foretold. So, in the text, his honourable interment after his disgraceful death is predicted: "his grave," as the words may be translated, "was appointed with the wicked; but with the rich was his tomb." Now, if we consider the treatment which Jesus was to meet with, it was necessary that such events as could not be foreseen by human wisdom, or accomplished by man's device, should be foretold; because such a concurrence of circumstances, all happening exactly according to the predictions concerning him, would fully vindicate his character, and manifest that all which he suffered was according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Notwithstanding he was innocent and spotless in himself, yet he was to be treated as the vilest of malefactors: nor

was he to be persecuted and put to death by men only, but to be an object also of the Divine displeasure. Therefore it was foretold by the prophet in the text, that, "*although*^a he had done no violence, neither was there any deceit in his mouth, yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief."

From these words we shall take occasion to consider, first, The innocence of Jesus ; secondly, The conduct of the Father towards him ; and thirdly, The reasons of that conduct.

I. Let us consider the innocence of Jesus—

The declaration of our Lord's innocence is here peculiarly strong : it is not merely asserted, That he did no violence, but it is taken for granted as a thing which could not admit of one moment's doubt ; "*although* he had done no violence." And indeed, well might it be taken for granted ; for, if he were not innocent himself, he could not be a propitiation for our sins : if he had in the least deviated from the perfect law of God, he himself had needed an atonement for his own sins, as much as we for ours. Under the ceremonial law, the lamb that was to be offered in sacrifice at the passover was solemnly set apart four days before, in order that it might be examined ; and, if it had the least spot or blemish, it was not worthy to be offered. To this St. Peter refers, when he calls our Lord "a Lamb without blemish, and without spot : " and it should seem that our Lord's entrance into Jerusalem just four days before the passover, and the strict examination of him before Pilate and the chief priests, were intended to fulfil that type. In reference to the same, St. John says, "He was manifested to take away our sin ; and in him was no sin ; " for if there had been any in him, he could not have removed ours.

^a The word "*because*" should be translated "*although*." See Bishop Lowth's version, which removes all the obscurities from this passage. If this subject were treated *separately*, and not in a series of Sermons on the chapter, the first and last clauses of the text should be omitted.

The text sets forth his innocence in two particulars ; “he did no violence, neither was there any deceit in his mouth.” Deceit and violence are the fruits of wisdom and power when abused : and alas ! wisdom is but too often employed in devising mischief, as power is in executing it. Our Lord was endued with wisdom ; for “in him were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge :” and he was possessed of power ; for all nature, animate and inanimate, was under his control : but he never abused either for the purposes of deceit or violence. On the contrary, he employed his wisdom in confounding his captious adversaries, and in explaining the mysteries of his kingdom to his followers : and his power he exerted in working miracles upon the bodies of men, and in effecting the conversion of their souls. Who can read any of his discourses without acknowledging, as they did of old, that “he spake as never man spake ?” who that hears him commanding the unclean spirits with authority, and rebuking the winds and the sea, must not immediately confess, that “no man could do these things except God were with him ?” Sometimes indeed he answered differently from what we might have expected ; as when he told the young man to “enter into life by keeping the commandments :” but this he did, because he knew that the young man’s heart was proud of his great attainments, at the same time that it was glued to his earthly possessions. This therefore was the way, not to deceive, but to undeceive him, by discovering to him the sinfulness of his heart : whereas, if he had told him at once, that the way to enter into life was by believing in him, he would indeed have given a more explicit answer to the question ; but he would have left him wholly ignorant of his own corruptions, and would have exposed him thereby to the tenfold danger of making, like Judas, an hypocritical profession. So our Lord may appear to have done violence when he beat the armed men backward to the ground by his word. But this was done in pity to their souls : it was the very way to convince them, that they were about to seize the

Lord's prophet; and thereby to make them desist from their purpose. If they were Jewish soldiers, as doubtless they were, because they were sent by the chief priests and elders, and Pilate was not yet acquainted with their intentions, they could not but have heard the history of the prophet Elijah, who struck *dead* two different companies of men, consisting of fifty each, who came to apprehend him. Now our Lord struck them to the ground to bring that to their remembrance: and when they would not desist, he resigned himself into their hands. He healed also the high-priest's servant, whose ear Peter had cut off: and, as he had once before rebuked his disciples, when they would have called fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village that had refused him admission, so now he told them, that "all who took the sword, should perish with the sword." Indeed, if there had been any *deceit* in Jesus, Judas would gladly have discovered it, as a justification of his own treachery; and if there had been any *violence* in him, his numerous and watchful enemies would not have failed to lay it to his charge. But, so far was he from using deceit or violence himself, that he has engaged to deliver his people from all, who, in either of these respects, should attempt to injure them: "He shall redeem their souls," says David, "from deceit and violence^b."

It appears then that his innocence in every respect stands unimpeached; "he was just such an high-priest as became us, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Nor was he more clear in the sight of men, than he was in the sight of God; for "he did always those things which pleased his Father:" and thrice did his Father, by an audible voice from heaven, declare him to be, "his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased."

But, however innocent he was, however free both from violence and deceit, yet he was not dealt with as innocent either by God or man: for, as his own countrymen treated him with the utmost barbarity,

^b Ps. lxxii. 14.

so even his heavenly Father acted towards him, as if he had been the greatest of all criminals ; as we shall see by considering,

II. The conduct of his Father towards him—

We must acknowledge that there is something inexpressibly awful, and deeply mysterious, in the declaration before us : nevertheless it will be found literally true, that, notwithstanding the complacency and delight which the Father must of necessity have taken in the immaculate Jesus, “it pleased the Lord to bruise him.”

That his heavenly Father did inflict punishment upon him, even these words indisputably prove ; as also do the words which immediately follow ; “he hath put him to grief.” There is also in other parts of Scripture abundant evidence to confirm it : for, all that either men or devils did, was not only by his permission, but by his express commission. The Father “spared not his Son, but *delivered him up* ;” and though the Jews took him, and by wicked hands crucified and slew him, yet St. Peter says, he was delivered up “by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” And indeed, how otherwise shall we account for his agony in the garden ? If it was produced by devils, still they “could have had no power against him, except it had been given them from above.” And what shall we say to that bitter lamentation which he uttered upon the cross ? The complaint arose, not from any pains of body, but from the desertion and wrath which his soul experienced from his heavenly Father : *then* the Father “*bruised him*.” This expression alludes to the holy incense mentioned in Exodus : “The Lord said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices with pure frankincense, and thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee ; and it shall be unto you most holy^c.” Before these spices could ascend up to God as incense, or be

^c Chap. xxx. 34, 36.

worthy to be laid up in the tabernacle, they were to be "beaten very small:" and in the same manner was Jesus to be bruised, before the incense of his merits could be accepted, or his own person be received into the tabernacle of the Most High. This was by far the most distressing part of our Saviour's sufferings; nor could we account for his behaviour under them, unless we believed, that they were inflicted by his heavenly Father: for many martyrs have endured all that men could inflict, not only with resignation, but with joy and triumph: but *here* we see no less a person than the Son of God exceeding sorrowful, even unto death, at the very apprehension of his sufferings: we hear him crying for the removal of the bitter cup, and bewailing in the most pathetic manner the intenseness of his agony.

Nor did the Father bruise him only, but, as the text intimates, *took pleasure* in bruising him: "It *pleased* the Lord to bruise him." The word which is here translated, "it pleased," includes in it an idea of complacency, and is strongly expressive of pleasure: the import of it is much the same with that which the Apostle uses, when he says, "With such sacrifices God is *well pleased*:" in conformity with which idea, Jehovah is said to smell a sweet savour from those sacrifices which prefigured the crucified Jesus. Indeed, the same idea, though not so expressly asserted, is supported and confirmed by many other passages of Scripture. In the very verse following the text, we are informed, that *the Father gave him promises on the express condition that he should endure his wrath for man*; that "when he should make his soul an offering for sin; he should see a seed, and should prolong his days;" that is, that, on condition of his bearing the wrath due to sinners, many should be everlastingly saved through him, and with him. In another place we are told that "*God sent his Son into the world for this very end*, that he might be the propitiation for our sins;" that is, that he might bear the punishment due to them: St. Paul also says, that "Christ was made sin, that is, a sin-offering, for us:"

and again, that "he was made a curse for us:" all of which passages shew that God sent him into the world on purpose to bruise him. And when the time should come for executing upon his Son all that he was ordained to suffer, the *prophet represents the Father as feeling a complacency in the very act*: "Awake, O my sword, against my Shepherd, against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts." We may further observe, that *the Father had from the beginning delighted in the sacrifices which were offered, because they were types of that sacrifice*, which Christ in due time should offer upon the cross. When Noah came out of the ark, he built an altar, and offered a burnt-offering upon it; and then we are told, "The Lord smelled a sweet savour." So, at the very time that our Lord was bruised, the Father was pleased with it; for the Apostle says of Christ, that he "gave himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour;" plainly implying, that as God was pleased with the offering of beasts by Noah, and with the savour of the incense which was composed of bruised spices, so he was pleased with the offering of his own Son, while he was yet consuming with the fire of divine wrath. *The Father has moreover exalted Jesus in consideration of his having endured the sufferings which he had appointed him.* The Apostle having set forth Christ as obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, adds, "*Wherefore* God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name." In the same manner, *every blessing which the Father bestows upon mankind is given as the purchase of Christ's blood, and as the reward of his obedience unto death.* Redemption includes every blessing of the covenant; every evil we are delivered from, and every good which we are ever to possess: and this the Apostle ascribes wholly to the efficacy of Christ's blood; "We have redemption," says he, "through his blood:" and another Apostle says, "Ye were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ."

Now did the Father give promises to his Son on the express condition of his suffering? Did he send him

into the world on purpose that he might suffer? Did he delight in other sacrifices merely as typical of those sufferings? Did he declare, that the offering up of his dear Son was an offering of a sweet-smelling savour? Did he exalt Christ for his sufferings? and does he continually bestow the richest blessings on his very enemies as a reward of those sufferings? Did he do all these things, and shall we not acknowledge that the sufferings of Christ were pleasing to him; or, to use the words of the text, that it *pleased* the Lord to bruise him?

However, we must not imagine that the mere act of inflicting punishment on his only dear Son could be pleasing to him: No: "He delighteth in mercy;" and "judgment is his strange work:" he is averse to punish even his enemies; and much more his own Son. But there were very sufficient reasons why he should be pleased with bruising his own Son; to illustrate which we shall consider,

III. The reasons of the Divine conduct—

If we expect to account for every thing, we shall soon reject the whole of revelation: God never intended that we should; nor indeed is it possible. We know that an ignorant peasant is not able to search out the reasons upon which a profound statesman acts; nor could he even comprehend them, if they were laid before him: and shall we wonder if there be some mysteries in the revelation and in the providence of God which we cannot explore, and which perhaps, if unfolded ever so clearly, would be far above our comprehension? Is not God far more exalted above us, than we can be above our fellow-creatures? We must therefore proceed with great humility and reverence, when we presume to investigate the reasons by which the all-wise God is actuated, especially in subjects so deeply mysterious as this which we are now contemplating. However, we will attempt to assign some reasons for his conduct.

He was pleased when he bruised his Son, first, because the bruising of him was *pleasing to his Son*. As

the Father did not take pleasure in inflicting punishment, so neither did the Son in enduring it, *for itself*; the punishment, considered separately from its consequences, was equally grievous to him who inflicted, and to him who bore it. But Jesus thirsted for the salvation of men; he knew that it could not be accomplished consistently with the rights of justice and truth, unless he should become their surety: he was well aware of all that he must undergo, if he should stand in the place of sinners; yet he cheerfully undertook it; "Then said he, Lo, I come; *I delight to do thy will, O my God*: yea, thy law is within my heart." And when the time for his sufferings was fully arrived, he drew not back, but said, "*Thy will be done*;" and "for the joy that was set before him" of redeeming so many millions from destruction, "he willingly endured the cross, and despised the shame." He reproved Peter as an agent of Satan himself, when he attempted to dissuade him from his purpose: "Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me." And, when the time drew nigh, he so longed for it, that "he was quite straitened till it could be accomplished." And therefore, as the Father knew how pleasing it would be to his Son to have the iniquities of mankind laid upon him, he himself found pleasure in laying them upon him: it gave him pleasure to put the finishing hand to that which had been agreed upon between them, and thus to make him "the author of eternal salvation" to all his people.

Another reason may be this: God was pleased with bruising his own Son, because it would prove so *beneficial to man*. We are not to imagine that the Son loved us more than the Father; for the Father expressed as much love in giving his Son, as the Son did in giving himself; the Father testified his compassion as much in laying our iniquities on his Son, as the Son did in bearing them in his own body on the tree. The whole work of salvation is the fruit of the Father's love: he pitied us when we fell; he in his own eternal counsels provided a Saviour for us before we did fall, yea, before we were brought into existence. He

saw how inconceivably miserable we must have been to all eternity if left to ourselves: he therefore covenanted with his Son, and agreed to pardon us, to give us peace, to adopt us for his children, to restore us to our forfeited inheritance, and to exalt us to glory, if *he* would, by substituting himself in our place, remove the obstacles which prevented the exercise of his mercy towards us. When therefore these counsels were nearly executed, the Father was pleased with putting the bitter cup into the hands of his Son, because it would henceforth be taken out of the hands of all those who should believe in Christ; none should perish but through their obstinate rejection of this Saviour; and all, who would embrace him, would be exalted to far higher glory than they would ever have obtained, if they had never fallen.

A third reason we may assign is this; the Father was pleased with bruising his own Son, because it would *put great honour upon the divine law*. We cannot but suppose that God must be concerned for the honour of his own law, because it is a perfect transcript of his own mind and will. Now this law had been violated and dishonoured by the transgression of man: if the sanctions of the law were not enforced, the law itself would be set aside; or, if the sanctions were enforced, still the punishment of the offender would never repair the dishonour done to the law, and the contempt he had poured upon it. But by the sufferings of Jesus “the law was magnified and made honourable.” The majesty of the law was manifested in having the Son of God himself subject to it: the authority of the law was established in that its penalties were inflicted even on the Son of God, when he stood in the place of sinners; and therefore no sinner could hope thenceforth to transgress it with impunity: the purity of the law was declared, in that nothing less than the blood of the Son of God could expiate any transgression against it: the justice of the law was held forth, in that it did not relax one jot or tittle of its demands even in favour of the Son of God. Now when the divine law was to be so magnified by

the voluntary sufferings of the Son of God, we cannot wonder that the lawgiver should be pleased; especially as the majesty of the law was *more* fully manifested, its authority *more* firmly established, its purity *more* conspicuously declared, and its justice *more* awfully displayed by means of the sufferings of the Son of God, than it could have been by the everlasting obedience of angels, or the everlasting misery of the whole human race.

The last reason we shall assign is this; the Father was pleased with bruising his own Son, because *he himself was thereby transcendently glorified*. God cannot but delight in the manifestation of his own glory: nor did he ever manifest it in such bright colours, as while he was bruising his own Son. When Judas went out to betray his Master, "Now," said Jesus, "the Son of man is glorified, and God is glorified in him." In that awful hour, the divine perfections, which seemed, as it were, to be at variance, were made to harmonize, and to shine with united splendour. We are at a loss what to admire most; the inflexibility of his justice which required such a sacrifice, or the heights of his love which gave it; his inviolable truth in punishing sin, or the extent of his mercy in pardoning the sinner; the holiness of his nature in manifesting such indignation against iniquity, or his wisdom and goodness in providing such a way of deliverance from it. Every attribute of the Deity is incomparably more glorified than it could have been in any other way; mercy shines in the way of satisfying the demands of justice, and justice in the way of exercising mercy. This view of the Deity was not more new to man, than it was to the angels in heaven; and when a ray of this glory shone forth at the incarnation of our Lord, the angels burst forth in joyful acclamations, and sang, "Glory to God in the highest." Since then the bruising of our Lord tended so much to the manifestation of the divine glory, no doubt the Father was well pleased with it.

We might assign more reasons, if it were necessary; but we trust that these are sufficient for the justifying

of the Father's conduct towards his Son. If, as has been shewn, the Father saw that the bruising of his Son would be pleasing to his Son, beneficial to man, honourable to his law, and glorious to himself, it can surely be no imputation on the Father's character to say, "It *pleased* him to bruise his Son."

Amidst the many REFLECTIONS which naturally arise from this subject, such as *the greatness of the Father's love* (in that "he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all"), and *the danger of unbelief* (in that, if we yield to it, the Father's wrath will infallibly fall on *us*^d), and others too numerous to mention, we shall confine our attention to one; namely,

How great must be the evil of sin!

We have seen the immaculate Jesus bruised under the weight of his Father's wrath, and his Father pleased with bruising him; and from whence did this arise? From the evil, the dreadful evil, of sin. Sin had introduced confusion into the divine government; sin had set the divine perfections at variance: sin had dishonoured the divine law: sin brought the Son of God from heaven: sin put him to death: and, had he not died, sin would have sunk us all into the lowest abyss of misery for ever. Sin reduced God himself to the necessity of delighting either to punish us, or to bruise his own Son. What must sin be, when such are the effects arising from it! And yet how lightly do we think of it! how unconcerned are we about it! But did our Surety think lightly of it, when he cried, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" Did the Father think lightly of it, when he was bruising his own Son? and do they think lightly of it who are now receiving the wages of it in hell? If nothing less than the blood of Christ could expiate it, is it a small evil? If it crushed even HIM with its weight, though he had none of his own to answer for, shall we find it easy to bear, who are so laden with iniquities? Let us but look at sin one moment as it appears in the death

^d Mark xvi. 16.

of Jesus; let us recollect that he was God equal with the Father; and that yet he almost sunk under the load; let us recollect this, I say, and we shall surely begin to tremble, lest we should lie under the weight of it for ever. We never shall see sin aright, till we view it in the tears and groans, the blood and agonies, of the Son of God: for there at once we behold both the evil, and the remedy of sin; there at once we learn to fear and hope, to weep and rejoice. If we look at sin in any other view, we may dread its consequences; but we shall never hate its malignity. But if we view it in the dying Jesus, we shall be delivered from the fear of consequences, because the guilt of it was expiated by him; and we shall begin to lothe it as a hateful and accursed evil. This is the only source of ingenuous, evangelical repentance; nor till we “look on Him whom we have pierced, shall we ever mourn aright for sin, or be in bitterness for it, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.” Let us then look at sin in this light, and we shall soon be like-minded with the Father; we shall be pleased with the sufferings of Jesus; they will be our hope, our plea, our joy, our boast; and we shall exultingly say with the Apostle, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

DCCCCLXXIII.

CHRIST'S DEATH A CONDITION OF OUR SALVATION.

Isai. liii. 10. *When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.*

THERE are in the Holy Scriptures many apparent contradictions, which, when properly understood, are perfectly consistent with each other. The redemption of our souls is continually represented as the freest gift of God: yet the very term redemption implies that a price is paid. But here is no real inconsistency; because that, which to *us* is as free as the light we behold, or the air we breathe, was dearly purchased by our blessed Lord; and the Apostle himself combines these ideas, saying, “We are justified freely by

God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The truth is, that eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ: but, before it could be thus freely given consistently with the divine perfections, it was necessary that an atonement should be made for sin: and, in order to the liberating of the debtor, the debt must be discharged by his Surety. Hence, when our Lord undertook to save us, a condition was imposed upon him, and the promise of success in his undertaking was suspended on his performance of that condition. The words before us lead us to consider,

I. The condition imposed—

To understand the true *nature* of this condition, it is necessary that we should advert to the offerings that were made under the law. If any person had sinned, even through ignorance, he was bound to bring an offering in order to make atonement for his sin. This offering was to be a bullock, or a male or female kid, or a lamb, according to the quality of the offender. He was to lay his hands upon the head of the offering, in token that he confessed himself to be deserving of death, and that he transferred his guilt to the creature that was to suffer in his stead. The creature was then killed; its blood was poured out at the foot of the altar, some of it having been previously put upon the horns of the altar; and then its fat was burnt upon the altar: and God smelling a sweet savour from it, accepted it on behalf of the offerer.

Now this will shew what Christ was to do. He had undertaken to save man: he must therefore come and put himself in the place of man; and present himself before God to suffer all that was due to our transgressions. But whereas the animals could suffer only in body, he was to suffer both in body and soul, and to present his whole person a sacrifice for sin. In consideration of this sacrifice every sinner in the universe was to have liberty to transfer his guilt to him, and, on so doing, to find acceptance with God through him. Thus he was to become the sinner's

substitute, or, as the Apostle expresses it, “to be made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

But what *necessity* was there for any such condition? Why must God's only dear Son become a man, and offer up himself a sacrifice for sin? To answer this important inquiry, we observe, *first*, that man, having once transgressed the law of God, could never afterwards be justified by obedience to it. The law denounced a curse against transgressors, but made no provision for their restoration to the Divine favour. It made no mention of repentance or amendment; it spake nothing of pardoning mercy; it simply required obedience, and inflicted the penalty of death on the disobedient. From that time “there could not be any law given whereby we might have life; for if there could, God tells us, that verily righteousness should have been by the law.” If therefore man ever was to be saved at all, there was a necessity that some other plan should be devised, whereby the law should take its course and yet the transgressor be rescued from condemnation. This could not be done unless a proper substitute for man could be found, who should at once satisfy all the demands of law and justice, and bring in a righteousness that should be transferable to man for his justification before God. Hence, *in the next place*, arose a further necessity for the death of Christ, namely, that there was none other found in the whole creation, who was capable of undertaking so great a work. As for “the blood of bulls and of goats, it was not possible that that could take away sin:” “nor could any man redeem his brother,” or even himself. If an angel, or all the angels of heaven, had attempted it, they must have failed: for in the very first instance they must have suffered eternal death. This was the penalty due to sin; and if it had been inflicted on them, they must have been in the state of the fallen angels to all eternity, seeing that there never would come a time, when it could be said, that the law was fully satisfied. Besides, their obedience to the law, even supposing

it to have been meritorious in the sight of God (which it could not be, because, “after having done all that was commanded them, they would be only unprofitable servants”), they could merit only for themselves : the righteousness of a mere creature could never have been so excellent as to deserve eternal happiness and glory for a sinful world. We do not indeed presume to limit God, and to say what he might or might not have done, if he had pleased. But according to the light given us in the Scripture we are warranted to say, that, if any lesser sacrifice would have answered all the purposes of his glory and of man’s salvation, he never would have sent “the man that was his fellow.” He would not have given his Son out of his bosom to die for us, if the death of a mere creature would have sufficed. This leads us to notice a *further* ground of Christ’s sacrifice, which was, that in it there was a sufficiency for the salvation of the whole world. Christ being God as well as man, there was an infinite *value in his sufferings* ; his sufferings for a time were equivalent to the sufferings of the whole world to all eternity. There was also an infinite *value in his obedience* ; so that it could merit, not for himself only, but for others, yea, for all the myriads of sinners who should trust in it. The penalty of the law being inflicted on HIM, Divine justice was satisfied ; and scope was opened for the exercise of mercy. The sinner’s debt being paid, the sinner could be discharged in perfect consistency with God’s truth and holiness.

Hence then it was that “help was laid upon One so mighty ;” and that such a condition was imposed upon him.

As to what is said of the Father “making his soul an offering,” the words may be translated either in the second or the third person : if in the second, they relate to the Father’s laying of our iniquities upon his Son ; if in the third (as they are in the *marginal translation*, which we rather prefer), they relate to Christ’s voluntarily making himself an offering.

But in addition to what we have spoken concerning

the *nature* and *necessity* of the condition imposed on Christ, it will be proper that we state, in few words, what the condition itself *implied*. It implied, that *there is no salvation but by the blood of Christ*. It has before been observed that such a condition would never have been imposed, if man could have been saved by any other means : and this is confirmed by that express declaration of the Apostle, “ There is no other name given under heaven, whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ.” It implied further, that *every sinner must actually present, as it were, to God the blood of Christ*, as his only plea for mercy and acceptance. He must put his hand on the head of his offering, confessing his desert of death, renouncing every self-righteous hope, and trusting simply in the sacrifice once made upon the cross. Lastly, it implied, that *this one offering, thus presented, shall be available for the very chief of sinners*. God’s end in sending his Son was, not only to save man, but to glorify himself in man’s salvation. It is true, that all his perfections are glorified in the salvation of the most righteous : but the efficacy of this atonement, together with God’s love in providing, and his mercy in accepting it, are more conspicuous, in proportion as those interested in it are redeemed from deeper condemnation. To have imposed such a condition for the purpose of saving a few only of the more worthy characters, would have given us reason to apprehend, either that the mercy of God was very limited, or that there was not a sufficiency in the Redeemer’s merits for the redemption of more atrocious sinners. But as these apprehensions are false and groundless, we may consider the very condition itself as importing, that the offering of Christ should be accepted for all that would trust in it.

Such was the condition imposed on God’s only dear Son, when he undertook to mediate for fallen man : “ He must make his own soul an offering for sin,” and die in the stead of those whom he would redeem.

The benefit arising from his performance of that condition is seen in,

II. The promises suspended on it—

Those specified in my text refer to three things; the *furtherance of man's welfare*; the *advancement of Christ's glory*; and the *accomplishment of the Father's eternal purposes*.

The furtherance of man's welfare entirely depended on Christ's performance of this condition. He could never have "seen a seed," nor could one of all the human race ever have been saved, without it. Our Lord himself both confirms and illustrates this by a beautiful comparison. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone: but, if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit^a." But by dying he was to obtain a people whom he was to have for ever as his "purchased possession." It had been foretold respecting him that "a seed should serve him; that all the ends of the earth should remember themselves and turn unto him; and that they should be counted to him for a generation^b." By conversion they were to stand related to him as his children, as being begotten by his word and Spirit, and as receiving through him a heavenly inheritance. These he was to "see." And behold, while he was yet in the very act of offering himself, he did see the earnest and first-fruits of his future harvest: in the very hour of death he converted the dying thief, and took him that very day to dwell with him in Paradise, as a monument of his victorious grace, and of his redeeming love. Nor had he long poured out his soul, when lo, another convert was born to God! No sooner did the Centurion, who had been ordered to superintend the execution, behold the manner of his death, and the signs and wonders that attended it, than he exclaimed, "Truly this was a righteous man, this was the Son of God!" In the space of a few days thousands confessed his power, and through the operation of his Spirit, became sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. Soon the handful of corn cast on the top of the mountains sprang up like the piles of grass for number, and the cedars of

^a John xii. 24.

^b Ps. xxii. 27, 30.

Lebanon for strength^c. Even to the present hour his family is increasing in every quarter of the globe: and soon the time shall arrive, when “a nation shall be born in a day,” and that word of his shall be literally fulfilled, “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.” And when all the number of his elect shall have been gathered to him in successive ages, he will come and summon them all into his presence, that he may rejoice in them, and they in him, for ever and ever.

The advancement of his own glory was to be another fruit of the accomplishment of his engagements: “He shall prolong his days.” This cannot relate to him as God, seeing that his divine nature necessarily exists in one unsuccessive eternity. But as man and as Mediator, he was to “prolong his days” in a state of glorious advancement, as a reward for terminating his days on earth under such circumstances of humiliation and abasement. This also had been foretold in the inspired volume; “he shall live; his name shall endure for ever; his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed^d.” Again, in another Psalm, “Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness; thou settest a crown of pure gold upon his head. He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever^e.” Accordingly, in spite of the stone, the seal, the watch, he rose triumphant, and ascended up far above all principalities and powers, and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. There shall he remain seated on his glorious throne, the one source of blessedness to all his creatures, till he shall come in the clouds of heaven, and take them to himself, that they may be one fold under one Shepherd for evermore. But all this glory was conditionally promised: he was first to become “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; and then he was to be highly exalted, and to have a name given him above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every

^c Ps. lxxii. 16.^d Ps. lxxii. 15, 17.^e Ps. xxi. 1—5.

tongue should confess that Jesus Christ was Lord, to the glory of God the Father^f."

The accomplishment of his Father's eternal purposes was to be yet a further part of his reward: "The pleasure of the Lord was to prosper in his hands." The pleasure of Jehovah, yea, his chief delight, is to save sinners. This was the end he proposed to himself in his eternal counsels, when he entered into covenant with his dear Son. He has given proof of this, in that he has sworn, "he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." "He willeth that *all* should be saved and come to the acknowledgment of the truth:" and, with respect to his elect, "it is his *good pleasure* absolutely to give them the kingdom^g." Nor, if we would entreat him to convert and save our souls, can we use any more suitable expressions than those of the Apostle, who prays, "that he would fulfil in us all the good pleasure of his goodness^h." But his sending of his Son, in order "that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have eternal life," is such an evidence of his love to sinners, as supersedes the necessity of any other proof, and must fill the universe with everlasting wonder and astonishment.

Now, as before the incarnation of Christ, the salvation of men was effected by the Father, so, since the coming of Christ, it has been carried on more immediately by the Son. During the first four thousand years of the world the work of conversion went on but slowly; there were few, very few, who experienced the saving efficacy of divine grace. But, when the office of rescuing sinners from the power of Satan came to be devolved on Jesus, then, according to the stipulation in the text, "the pleasure of the Lord was to prosper in his hands." And how marvellously has it prospered, notwithstanding all the opposition of men and devils! There is not a day, an hour, a moment, wherein he is not beholding with joy the success of his endeavours: the ignorant are enlightened, the weak established, the doubting comforted, and all the

^f Phil. ii. 8—11.

^g Luke xii. 32.

^h 2 Thess. i. 11.

hosts of the redeemed prepared for glory : nor shall his success be ever interrupted. To the latest period of time he shall go forth conquering, and to conquer, till all his enemies be put under his feet, and all his ransomed ones be seated on thrones of glory.

And now what should we LEARN from this subject ?
Surely we must see in it,

1. How difficult a work is the salvation of man !

Was there no other way whereby it could be effected ? Could there be no remission without shedding of blood ? And must that blood be the blood of God's only Son ? Must HE take our nature and offer himself without spot to God, before our peace could be made, or a way be opened for our restoration to happiness ? Go, then, ye careless ones, who think all anxiety about the soul superfluous ; go read the terms of this covenant ; and see whether the salvation of man be so easy to be effected as you have hitherto imagined : see what a stupendous effort of wisdom and love was necessary before there was even a possibility for one of us to be saved ! and, if such exertions were necessary on the part of the Father and of Christ, do ye suppose that there is no occasion for exertion on your part ? Did Christ purchase for you not merely an exemption from death and hell, but also from all solicitude about your eternal interests ? — — — Yea, rather, do not his labours for you shew how you ought to labour for yourselves ? Awake, then, from your slumbers, and work out your salvation with fear and trembling. You feel the need of labouring for the bread that perisheth ; begin then to labour in good earnest for that which endureth to everlasting life, which the Son of man will give you.

2. Next observe, How wonderful was the love of Christ in undertaking such things for the effecting of your salvation !

When God declared that he had no pleasure in sacrifices and burnt-offerings, and that he must have a far nobler sacrifice than that of beasts to satisfy the

demands of his justice, the Saviour instantly undertook for us, saying, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God; I delight to do thy will, however painful the consequences of it may be to myself; yea, thy law is within my heart." He perfectly knew what it was to make his soul an offering for sin: he did not undertake it hastily, or without being apprised of the full extent of his engagements: but, foreseeing all the shame and misery that he must endure for our redemption, he undertook to effect it; nor ever receded, till he had accomplished all that was needful for it. Never can we sufficiently admire this astonishing love. O let us fix our minds upon it, and labour, if possible, to comprehend its heights and depths! Though "it passes the knowledge" of men and angels, yet shall our meditations on it be sweet, and our sense of it an antepast of heaven itself.

3. Lastly, How cheerfully should we submit to any conditions for *his glory*, who submitted to such conditions for *our good*!

What is it that our God requires of us? It is simply this; that we should repent, believe, obey. And shall such conditions appear hard? If God had required that, in order to our final happiness, every one of us should endure the miseries of hell a thousand years, we ought to have embraced his offers of salvation with gratitude and joy; for, what are a thousand years in comparison of eternity? But when he only enjoins us to repent of those iniquities, for which the Saviour died; and to believe in him, whom the Father has set forth for a propitiation; and to obey his precepts, which are holy, just, and good; shall these injunctions be thought grievous? Shall we turn our back upon him, saying, "If I cannot be saved without all this trouble, I will not be saved at all?" Well indeed might *Jesus*, when the conditions of our salvation were proposed to *him*, have replied, "No; if man cannot be saved on lower terms than these, let him perish. But what lower terms could *we* wish for? Yea, what is there in all our duties, which does

not tend even to our present happiness? Let us then embrace the Gospel with all thankfulness: and let us cheerfully comply with all that God has required of us, knowing assuredly that he is faithful who hath promised, and that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

DCCCCLXXIV.

CHRIST'S SATISFACTION IN HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. liii. 11. *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.*

THE prospect of saving a ruined world was a strong inducement with our Lord to undertake the office of mediating between God and them, and afforded him rich consolation under the heavy trials he was called to endure in the execution of that office. And, now that his expectations are in a measure realized, he feels an inexpressible complacency in a retrospect upon all that he had done and suffered for our sake. It had been declared in the foregoing verse, that, after making his soul an offering for sin, he should see a seed, who should be, as it were, his spiritual offspring. In the words before us, the same promise is repeated, though with a remarkable variation in the terms; and it is foretold that, in the accomplishment of this promise, he should feel the most abundant satisfaction.

The promise of a successful issue to his undertaking having been already considered, we shall wave every thing relating to that, and make some remarks upon *the representation which is here given of believers, and the satisfaction which our blessed Lord takes in them in that particular view.*

I. The representation here given of believers—

Of all the numberless descriptions given of believers in the Holy Scriptures, there is not any one so interesting as that before us. Similar ideas indeed are suggested in many passages, where mankind are spoken of as begotten of God, and as sons and

daughters of the Lord Almighty: but there is a tenderness in the expression before us, which well deserves our most attentive consideration.

The image of a travailing woman is very commonly used by the inspired writers to illustrate different topics. As applied to the ungodly, it expresses the fear and terror, the distress and anguish, which they either do experience under the Divine chastisements^a, or will experience, when death and judgment shall come upon them^b. As applied to the godly, it declares the relation which they bear to the church^c, to ministers^d, and to Christ himself^e. It is in this last view that we are now called to notice it.

Without entering too minutely into so delicate a subject we may observe, that believers are justly represented as the fruit of the Redeemer's travail, both *on account of their being brought into the family of God by means of his sufferings*; and *on account of his watching over them continually with more than maternal care and anxiety*.

It is solely by means of his sufferings that they are brought into the family of God. They were indeed prepared from eternity in the womb of the divine counsels: they were "given to Christ," and "chosen in him from the foundation of the world^f." Long before the Gentiles were actually called, our Lord spake of his having many, who were not of the Jewish fold, whom yet he must in due season bring into his church^g." And the Apostle Paul, though he was so long ignorant of God, and a bitter persecutor of the Church, yet speaks of himself as a chosen vessel, that had been "separated to God from the womb^h." But that whereby men are really brought into the family of God, is the crucifixion of Christ. If Christ had not "borne their sins in his own body on the tree," and "made his soul too an offering for sin," not one of them could ever have enjoyed the Divine favour,

^a Isai. xxvi. 16—18. Jer. xxx. 6, 7.

^b 1 Thess. v. 3.

^c Isai. liv. 1. with Gal. iv. 27.

^d Gal. iv. 19.

^e The text.

^f John xvii. 2. Eph. i. 4.

^g John x. 16.

^h Gal. i. 15.

not one of them could ever have presumed to cry, Abba, Father! But by his stripes they obtain healing, and peace by his chastisements, and life by his death. By his vicarious sufferings they are exempt from all the penal effects of sin, and have the power and privilege of becoming sons of Godⁱ. To this one source is the whole of their salvation continually traced in the inspired volume. Are they redeemed from the curse of the law? It is by his having become a curse for them^k. Are they made the righteousness of God in Christ? It is by his having been first made a sin-offering for them^l. The troubles of his soul, whether in the garden or on the cross, were the travail, of which their salvation is the fruit. And as a parent, looking on her numerous family, may call to mind the pangs which she endured at each successive birth; so may the Lord Jesus, when he beholds the various members of his family, well recollect the sufferings which he endured by means of each; there not being so much as one among them, who has not occasioned him many bitter pangs, not one, for whom he did not endure the wrath of an offended God.

But believers may also be called the travail of the Redeemer's soul on account of his watching over them with more than maternal care and anxiety. St. Paul speaks of himself, not only as having travailed in birth with the Galatian Christians at their first conversion, but as "travailing in birth *again* with them, until Christ should be formed in them." He saw that they were in danger of being drawn away from the faith of Christ by the false teachers who had crept in among them; and he illustrates his anxious concern for their welfare by this affecting image. Well therefore may we apply it unto Christ, whose love to the very meanest of his children so infinitely exceeds all that the most exalted creature is capable of feeling. He sees all the dangers to which they are exposed, and all the perverseness which they manifest. He well knows how much more ready they are to follow the counsels of their deceitful adversary, than to adhere resolutely to

ⁱ John i. 12.^k Gal. iii. 13.^l 2 Cor. v. 21.

the truth of God. How often, alas! do they grieve his Spirit by their evil deeds! How often do they even "crucify him afresh, and put him to an open shame," by acting unworthily of the relation they bear to him! If even earthly parents are sometimes so distressed by the follies and indiscretions, or by the troubles and miseries of their dear children, that all the pangs of child-birth were as nothing in comparison of the sorrows they afterwards conflict with, much more may we consider the sympathy of Christ in our afflictions, and his grief at our misconduct, as a renewal of the troubles he sustained on Calvary. Nor are his labours destitute of their desired effect: "he heals that which was sick, and binds up that which was broken, and brings back that which was driven away^m," and, by his almighty power, "keeps them unto his heavenly kingdom." Thus, in whatever light we view believers, whether as purchased by his blood, or as preserved by his grace, we see how just is the representation given of them, as the fruit of the Redeemer's travail.

While we stand amazed at this endearing description of the Lord's people, let us consider,

II. The satisfaction which Christ takes in them in this particular view—

Our blessed Lord himself, advertising his disciples of the troubles which they were to sustain by means of his removal from them, and the permanent joys that they should afterwards experience, as soon as he should renew his visits to them, illustrates his discourse by the very simile before us: "A woman," says he, "when she is in travail, hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world: and ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from youⁿ." Such is the satisfaction also which Christ himself is here represented as feeling, in the sight of those who are born to God through him.

^m Ezek. xxxiv. 15, 16.

ⁿ John xvi. 21, 22.

He is satisfied, first, *when he beholds any penitent sinner returning unto God*. Were there but one in the whole universe, and he the meanest and the vilest of the human race, that should “bethink himself, saying, What have I done?” and should tremble at the denunciations of God’s wrath, and turn to the Lord with sorrow and contrition, our compassionate Lord would instantly fix his eyes on him; according to that promise, “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word^o.” When his people of old began to repent of their transgressions, he was attentive to the first motions of their hearts, and declares to us with what pleasure he noticed the smallest risings of good in them; “Ephraim said, What have I to do any more with idols?” upon which the Lord immediately adds with exultation, “I have heard him, and observed him^p.” So, on another occasion, as though he had been listening unobserved to the lamentations of his servant, he says, “Surely I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; Turn thou me, and I shall be turned.” Upon which his whole soul is moved with pity; and he exclaims, “Is not this my dear son? is he not a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; yea my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord^q.” To illustrate the pleasure which he takes in the return of one sinner unto God, he expatiated upon it in three different parables. He sets forth a shepherd rejoicing over a lost sheep, and calling upon all his friends and neighbours to sympathize with him on so joyful an occasion. Then, changing the illustration to that of a woman finding a piece of silver after a long and careful search; and afterwards, to that of a father receiving his prodigal child, and making merry with him on account of the happy alteration of his state, and the blessed change wrought upon his soul, he declares, in terms as strong as language can afford,

^o Isai. lxvi. 2.^p Hos. xiv. 8.^q Jer. xxxi. 18, 20.

the delight he feels, when one single person is recovered unto God through him. He forgets at once all the labour and travail he has endured, or rather he looks back upon it with most heart-felt satisfaction, as soon as ever he sees it brought to a successful issue.

He is satisfied, next, *when he sees his redeemed people walking uprightly with God.* The pleasure, which a parent enjoys at the first sight of her new-born infant, is increased, when she beholds it growing up to maturity in the full enjoyment of all its faculties, and the uniform discharge of all its duties. Thus our "Lord taketh pleasure in his people;" and every grace they exercise, every service they perform, every sacrifice they offer, is "pleasing and acceptable in his sight." The beloved Apostle knew no greater joy than to see his children walk in truth. So our Lord, when his people grow in grace, and make their profiting to appear, "rejoices over them with joy, and rests in his love, and joys over them with singing^r." So delighted is he with the view of them, that "he rejoices over them to do them good," and engages "with his whole heart and with his whole soul," in securing to them the everlasting possession of his heavenly kingdom^s. Though he is so high, yet hath he respect unto them, "coming to them," "manifesting himself to them as he does not unto the world" in the most intimate and endearing manner, shedding abroad his love in their hearts, and maintaining fellowship with them, as a parent with her dear children. This is opened by the prophet in terms so accommodated to the text, and so beautifully descriptive of the truth before us, that we cannot refrain from quoting his words. After repeating several times that Zion should travail in birth, and have a numerous issue, Christ calls on all of them to rejoice in their happy lot, and "to suck and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolation:" and then *in direct reference to himself*, he says, "then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees; as one whom his mother comforteth,

^r Zeph. iii. 17.

^s Jer. xxxii. 41.

so *will I comfort you*; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem^t."

But most of all will our adorable Lord be satisfied, *when he shall behold all his family surrounding his throne in glory*. While they are here, he is too often grieved with them, and constrained to hide his face from them. But, when they shall be exalted to heaven, there will be an end of all their imperfections; they will all be pure as God is pure, and holy as God is holy: they will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father; never to suffer an eclipse, never to set again. If a parent finds all her joys consummated, when she sees those, with whom she has travailed, and over whom she has so long watched, comfortably at last settled in the world, how must Jesus rejoice, when he sees all his children settled beyond the reach of harm, in the full enjoyment of that kingdom which was provided for them from the foundation of the world! With what satisfaction must he reflect upon the travail of his soul, when he shall see myriads, countless as the sands upon the sea-shore, surrounding his throne, and hear them all acknowledging with one voice, that they were washed from their sins in his blood, and that all their happiness is the fruit of his obedience unto death! If, even in the days of his humiliation, he was so transported with this joy set before him, that, in consideration of it, he cheerfully endured the cross, and despised the shame, much more, when he shall see the full accomplishment of his gracious purposes, will he look back upon his troubles with complacency and delight. He will then wholly occupy himself in making them happy, "feeding them" with all the fruits of Paradise, and "leading them to living fountains of waters," that they may drink of those rivers of pleasure, which are at God's right hand for evermore^u."

By way of IMPROVING this subject, we may further observe,

^t Isai. lxvi. 7—13.

^u Rev. vii. 17. and Ps. xvi. 11. and xxxvi. 8.

1. How must the Lord Jesus be grieved when he sees sinners utterly regardless of him!

Surely if a mother, after all her pain and anguish, behold a lifeless corpse, where she had expected a living child, her disappointment must be great. And must not Jesus be grieved, when he beholds "those, for whom he died, perishing" in their sins? If when the Jews alone were offered him as the fruit of his travail, he so regretted the loss of the Gentile world, that he exclaimed, "Then have I laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain^x," doubtless it must be painful to him, after having had a promise of the heathen also for his inheritance, to see myriads, even of his professed followers, as unconcerned about him, as if he had never come into the world. And are there not many such amongst us? many, whose voice he never yet heard in fervent prayer? many, who have never yet expressed any desire after him, any concern about him? The Apostle Paul could appeal to God that he had "great heaviness, and continual sorrow in his heart for his brethren's sake:" and Jeremiah, in the view of the troubles that were coming on his nation, cried out, "My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart!" much more therefore must the compassionate Jesus, who wept and prayed for his very murderers, be afflicted at the guilt and danger of the unbelieving world. It is true, that, strictly speaking, he is incapable of sorrow in his present state: but the Scripture, to accommodate itself to our feeble apprehensions, represents him as exercising human passions, because, with respect to us, he will act as if he were either gratified by our attention, or grieved by our neglect. Careless sinners are spoken of as grieving and vexing his Holy Spirit, yea, moreover, as crucifying him afresh, and trampling under foot his precious blood. Let not then such aggravated guilt be found in us. Let us not so requite our gracious and adorable benefactor. He yet waiteth to be gracious unto us: he seeks us, as he did the

^x Isai. xlix. 4.

Samaritan woman, that vile notorious adulteress, that he may turn us from the error of our ways, and save our souls alive. And, as on that occasion "he had meat to eat which the world knew not of^y," so will his soul be refreshed and comforted with the first prospect of delivering us from sin and death.

2. What obligations lie on all of us to repent and turn to God!

There is one way, and only one, in which we can afford any satisfaction to our blessed Lord; and that is, by going to him for his benefits, and receiving at his hands the blessings he has purchased for us. And shall we hesitate to do this? shall not a sense of gratitude impel us, strengthened as it is, and confirmed by a concern for our eternal interests? If our Lord had required some great thing of us, ought we not to do it? How much more then when he only says, Wash, and be clean! Had he required that we should spend our whole lives in such a state of pain and travail as he himself endured, we ought gladly to comply with his will, and account ourselves happy in such an opportunity of testifying our love to him. But when he desires only, that we should seek our own truest interests, and declares, that he finds his happiness in making us happy, we should turn to him without delay, and give ourselves up to him without reserve. Hear his own word; "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that *fear* him, in them that *hope* in his mercy." Now if you cannot love him as you would, yet if you can *fear* him; if you cannot rejoice in an assurance of his mercy, yet if you can only *hope* in it, you will thereby afford him pleasure. And will you think this too much to do for him who travailed, as it were, in birth for you? Repentance indeed must precede a sense of favour and reconciliation with God. But the deeper our contrition, the more exalted will be the joy that follows it. Let us then look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness for our manifold transgressions. So shall Jesus

^y John iv. 18, 29, 32.

be recompensed for all that he has endured for us; and we shall participate his glory and blessedness for ever and ever.

3. How securely may we commit ourselves into the Saviour's hands!

If a child can be safely trusted with any one, surely it may with her, who travailed in birth with it, and who must therefore be most deeply interested in its welfare. But infinitely more secure are we in the hands of Jesus, as he himself tells us by the prophet: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Can such a monster be found? Yea, says our Lord, they may forget; yet will not I forget thee: behold, thou art graven on the palms of my hands^z." We need only commit ourselves to him, and he will approve himself faithful to his promises. He will keep us by his power; he will "guide us by his eye:" "he will carry the lambs in his bosom, and gently lead them that are with young." "Nor shall any weapon formed against us prosper." "Our place of defence shall be the munition of rocks: bread shall be given us, and our water shall be sure." He will "keep us as his garden; he will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, he will keep it day and night." Let us then "commit ourselves to him in well-doing, as into the hands of a faithful Redeemer," assured that he will "keep that which we have committed to him, and preserve us unto his heavenly kingdom."

^z Isai. xlix. 14—16.

DCCCCLXXV.

THE MEANS OF OUR JUSTIFICATION BEFORE GOD.

Isai. liii. 11. *By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.*

IT is not possible to conceive a more difficult question for unenlightened reason to resolve, or one in the resolution of which mankind are more deeply interested, than this, How shall a sinner be justified before God? Every man feels himself a sinner, and

has, in a greater or less degree, a sentence of condemnation within his own bosom. And the more he considers his state, the more he feels an anxiety to know how he may escape the punishment he deserves, and secure the favour of his God and Judge. The words before us remove all doubt upon this subject: they represent Christ as God's servant, sent and commissioned for this very end, to justify sinners by the knowledge of himself; and, while they thus declare the *means* of our justification, they specify also the *ground* of it; for however gratuitous this blessing is, as it respects us, it is altogether procured for us by the vicarious sacrifice of the Son of God.

Let us consider, then,

I. The means of our justification before God—

Christ is the person spoken of throughout this whole chapter: and here, as in the preceding chapter^a, he is denominated God's "servant." This title belongs to him only in his mediatorial capacity; for in his own nature, Christ is one with the Father, in glory equal, in majesty co-eternal. The appellation of "righteous," which is here applied to him, is of peculiar force in this connexion. He was eminently righteous above every creature in earth or heaven. Of fallen men, "there is none righteous, no, not one." And though the angels are holy, yet is their righteousness not originally of, and from, themselves; it is the gift of God: nor is it immutable, seeing that many have fallen from it; and the preservation of those who maintain their first estate, is also the effect of God's distinguishing grace: but Christ is essentially, eternally, and immutably righteous. Moreover, angels are righteous for themselves alone; but Christ is righteous for us, having fulfilled all righteousness with the express view to impute that righteousness to us, that so we may have a righteousness wherein to appear before God, and God may be just in justifying us^b. The particular application of the term "righteous" to him as justifying sinners, shews, that it is to be understood in

^a ver. 13.

^b Rom. v. 19. and iii. 26.

this extent, and as equivalent to that name which is elsewhere given him, "The Lord our Righteousness."

To "justify" sinners is the work assigned him by the Father. It is his office to take even the most sinful of the human race, and so to purge them from all iniquity that they may stand before God without spot or blemish, and be regarded by him as though they never had sinned at all. This is a work which none other can perform; nor, if God had not revealed a way in which it might be done, could we have conceived it possible that such a marvellous work should ever be accomplished.

By what *means* he makes us partakers of this blessing, we are told in the words before us; it is "by or through the knowledge of himself;" he enables us to behold him as he is revealed in the Scriptures, and leads us to embrace him as our all-sufficient portion. Knowledge in general has its seat in the understanding only; but the knowledge of Christ is seated both in the understanding and the heart. Hence, in order to be justified by Christ, we must not only view him as appointed of God to save us, but to this theoretical knowledge we must add the approbation of our hearts: we must have such a full persuasion of our inability to save ourselves, and of his sufficiency to save us, as determines us to renounce all dependence on an arm of flesh, and to glory in him alone. This is the knowledge of which our Lord speaks, when he says, "This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent:" and it is by this alone that any sinner can be justified.

Now by bringing men thus to know him and believe in him, he has justified many in all ages, and is yet daily communicating to thousands the blessings of salvation. It is true that, in comparison of the ungodly world, the justified have been but few in number, a little flock, a small remnant: but in the last day, when they shall all be collected together, they will be numberless like the stars of heaven, or the sands upon the sea shore. Nor is any one, however vile, excluded from the hope of justification, provided he be willing

to embrace this Saviour. On the contrary, if all the people in the universe would but look to him for the ends and purposes for which he is revealed in the gospel, they should instantly experience in their souls what the wounded Israelites experienced in their bodies when they looked to the brazen serpent in the wilderness: they should be delivered from all the fatal consequences of their sins, and be endued with spiritual and eternal life.

To mark more clearly the connexion between the means and the end attained by them, it will be proper to advert to,

II. The ground of our justification—

The way appointed for our restoration to the divine favour is not a mere arbitrary institution of the Deity: there is a fitness in it, and a suitableness which deserves peculiar notice. It may be asked, Whence comes it that a knowledge of Christ should be the means of a sinner's acceptance with God? What has Christ done, that he should be authorized to justify sinners by means so inadequate to their end? In other words, supposing these means effectual to their end, what is the ground on which they become so? To these questions the text affords us a precise and satisfactory answer.

The vicarious sacrifice of our blessed Lord has been repeatedly insisted on in the foregoing parts of this prophecy; and here it is again spoken of as the ground on which he justifies those who believe in him. For the elucidating of this point let two things be considered;

First, *The sacrifice of Christ removes all the obstacles to our salvation.* When man had fallen, there were many things which seemed to render his restoration impossible. The law, which he had broken, denounced a curse against him; nor could the lawgiver, however desirous he might be to rescind his decree, revoke his word consistently with his own perfections: his justice demanded satisfaction for the breach of the law; his holiness rendered it necessary that he should shew his

utter abhorrence of sin ; and his truth was pledged for the execution of the sentence which he had annexed to the violation of his commands ; and therefore there seemed no alternative for God, no hope for man. But Christ, in becoming our surety, and bearing our iniquities in his own body, removed all these difficulties at once : he magnified the law by enduring its penalties, and made it honourable by fulfilling its commands : he also satisfied the demands of his Father's justice, truth, and holiness, and afforded to the whole creation a most awful proof, that sin could never be committed with impunity. There was, indeed, yet one more impediment to man's recovery. Man, having once fallen, had lost that righteousness which qualified him for the enjoyment of his God. But this also was removed in the very same way ; for Christ's obedience unto death not only rendered our salvation consistent with the rights of law and justice, but constituted also a righteousness which was capable of being imputed to us ; and procured for us the Holy Spirit, by whose almighty agency we are renewed after the divine image in righteousness and true holiness. Thus every obstacle to our salvation being removed by the death of Christ, that death may properly be called the ground of our justification.

But, in the next place, *the sacrifice of Christ has obtained for him a right to justify whom he will.* We are often said to be "bought with a price;" and it is particularly specified, that the price paid was, the blood of Christ^c; yea, that "God purchased the Church with his own blood^d." Now it is obvious, that he who purchases any thing, has a right to the thing purchased, as soon as ever he has paid the price. Thus then has Christ a right to us as "his purchased possession." Moreover, Christ is represented as a surety who has discharged our debt ; who may therefore demand our liberty, and deliver us out of the hands of our adversary, who threatens to cast us into prison. Nor is this all : for, as has been observed on a foregoing part of this prophecy, God had bound himself

^c 1 Pet. i. 19.

^d Acts xx. 28.

by covenant to give him a seed ; and had promised that, “ if he would lay down his soul an offering for sin, the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hand.” Christ therefore, having fulfilled his part of the covenant, may claim the fulfilment of the Father’s engagements, and, by virtue of the authority committed to him, may reveal himself to sinners in order to their eternal salvation. Thus, whether we consider the justification of sinners as *obtained for* them, or *imparted to* them, the death of Christ must be acknowledged as the true and only ground of it.

These points being so fully opened in other parts of this chapter, we may wave any further discussion of them, and propose for adoption such a line of conduct as shall ENSURE to every one the blessing here spoken of.

1. Let us read the Scriptures with care and diligence—

The Holy Scriptures are the only fountain of divine knowledge. They are a kind of map, whereby we may find our way through this trackless desert, and arrive in safety at our Father’s house. Our Lord says, “ Search the Scriptures ; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.” Let us then not merely read them, but attend particularly to the testimony which they bear to Christ. Nor let us peruse them in a cursory manner, as though they needed no study or investigation ; but rather let us examine them with deep attention, as we would a will or testament by which our title to a large inheritance was to be determined. What a succession of hopes and fears would arise in our breast, when we read in such a will the passages that appeared prosperous or adverse ; and what diligence should we use to make our title clear ! How glad should we be to consult those who could give us information on the subject, and what a deep impression would their opinion make upon our minds, particularly if it were grounded on authentic records, and established cases ! Such is the way in which we

should search the holy oracles for ourselves, and hear them expounded to us by others: nor should we ever rest till we can prove out of them, by indisputable evidence, our right and title to the heavenly inheritance. Happy would it be for us, if we sought the knowledge of Christ! we should soon be guided into all truth: and be made wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus.

But while we thus read the Scriptures,

2. Let us pray for the teaching of the Holy Spirit—

To unenlightened man, the Scriptures are “a sealed book;” nor, however learned he may be in other sciences, can he attain the knowledge of Christ, unless the Holy Spirit shine into his heart to give him that knowledge^e. If we look at a sun-dial, we may understand the use and import of the figures; yet can we not attain a knowledge of the time unless the sun shine upon it. So it is with respect to the word of God: we may understand the general meaning of the words; yet can we not receive its spiritual instructions, unless we have that “unction of the Holy One, whereby we may know all things.” The words of Christ “are spirit and life;” and a spiritual discernment is necessary in order to a just apprehension of their import^f. St. Paul had studied the Scriptures diligently, but could never find Christ in them, till the light shone upon him from heaven, and the scales fell from his eyes. The Apostles had been instructed by our Lord himself between three and four years; and yet could not enter into the truths which the prophets and Christ himself had declared, till “he opened their understandings to understand the Scriptures.” Nor, with all our advantages, have we any more power to comprehend his truth; for he expressly tells us, that “no man knoweth either the Father or the Son, except the Holy Spirit reveal him unto us^g.” Hence for the attainment of divine knowledge we are directed to combine a dependence on God’s Spirit with our own researches: “If thou criest after knowledge,

^e 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^f 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^g Matt. xi. 27.

and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God; for the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding^h.” Let us then not presume to separate what God has thus united, but pray with David, “Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.”

There is yet another direction, which it is of infinite importance to attend to, namely,

3. Let us guard against self-righteousness—

There is no evil that cleaves more closely to our nature than self-righteousness. We are always wanting to be justified by some other way than that proposed in the text. Like Naaman, if some great thing were required of us, we should gladly do it; but when it is said to us, “Wash and be clean,” “Believe and be saved,” we turn away in disgust. The very simplicity of this fundamental truth offends us. Were we told that we must *work* diligently, and become *godly* in order to obtain justification, we should think the direction safe and proper: but the Scripture account of the way of being justified is directly opposite to this: St. Paul says, that “to him that *worketh not*, but believeth on him that justifieth the *ungodly*, his faith is counted for righteousnessⁱ,” and this appears so strange, that men cannot, and will not, admit it. But the Apostles themselves could not obtain justification in any other way, than by renouncing all their own righteousness, and by going as *ungodly* and perishing sinners unto Christ, that they might be accepted through him alone. This is affirmed by St. Paul himself, who says, “We, who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, *even we* have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the

^h Prov. ii. 3—6.

ⁱ Rom. iv. 5.

law shall no flesh be justified^k." Let us then guard against every species and degree of self-righteousness, and look for justification solely through the knowledge of Christ, and by faith in his all-atoning sacrifice.

4. Let us, however, be careful to shew forth our faith by our works—

Because we say, That we are not to work at all *with a view to obtain justification by our works*, but that we must accept justification freely as ungodly and perishing sinners, must we be understood to say, That men need not to work at all, but are at liberty to continue ungodly? No; by no means. We maintain the absolute necessity both of diligence and universal godliness: we only deny to these things the office of justifying the soul. We declare to all, that they must be daily "working out their salvation with fear and trembling," and that "faith without works is dead." Let this then be borne in mind; There is, and can be, but one way of a sinner's justification before God, and that is, by the knowledge of Christ, and faith in his name: but this free salvation, so far from giving any licence for sloth and wickedness, is the strongest incentive to holiness, and the greatest possible obligation to good works. Let us then shew forth our faith by our works. In this way we may be justified by our *works*, even as Abraham and Rahab were^l; that is, we may evince the reality of our faith, and the sincerity of our hearts. Thus shall we assign to faith and works their proper offices, and adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

^k Gal. ii. 15, 16.

^l Jam. ii. 21, 25. compared with Rom. iv. 2, 3, 6.

DCCCCLXXVI.

THE FRUIT OF CHRIST'S DEATH AND INTERCESSION.

Isai. liii. 12.—*Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*

IT is at this time, as it has also been in all former ages, an objection frequently urged against the true disciples of Christ, that few, if any, of the wise and noble embrace their sentiments. When our blessed Lord himself ministered on earth, it was asked with scornful triumph, "Have any of the rulers and of the Pharisees believed on him?" But, if we confess, with the Apostle, that "not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble are called," we must resolve the difficulty into the sovereign will of God, who has "chosen the foolish and weak things of the world, to confound the wise and mighty, and the base and contemptible things of the world, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence." There is, however, a period fixed in the divine counsels, when the great and mighty, as well as others, shall become obedient to the faith: and to that event the prophet directs our attention in the text. According to the present translation indeed the Lord Jesus is represented as dividing the spoil *in concert with* the great: but it should rather be translated, "I will divide him *the great for a portion*, and he shall divide *the strong for a spoil*." Agreeably to this sense of the words, we are led to view him as a victorious monarch triumphing over all the potentates on earth, and both seizing them for his spoil, and enjoying them for his portion.

In illustrating this passage, it will be proper to consider,

I. The promise made to Christ—

The conversion of the world to Christ is a frequent subject of prophecy: whole chapters are occupied in describing it^b: we are told that the power of godliness shall one day pervade all ranks of people "from the least even to the greatest;" and that kings will account it their highest honour to be "the nursing-fathers of the Church, and queens her nursing-mothers." This was fulfilled in part in the Apostles' days, when many persons of rank and power embraced

^a See Vitringa in loc. or Bishop Lowth. ^b Isai. xlix. and lx.

the truth. But it was yet further accomplished in the time of Constantine, when the Roman empire professed subjection to the Gospel; and the religion of Christ became the established religion of the world. Since that time the chief princes of Europe have called themselves by the name of Christ, and wished to be esteemed his followers. It is true indeed that far the greater part of them have only called him Lord, Lord, while they have had no desire to do the things which he commands: still, however, their very professions of regard to his name are sufficient to shew what we may expect, when God shall make bare his arm, and go forth in the chariots of the everlasting Gospel, conquering and to conquer. The time shall come when "Christ shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth; when all kings shall fall down before him, and all nations shall serve him^c."

But the terms in which this promise is expressed deserve a more minute attention. The kingdom of Christ, considered as "a portion which the Father divides unto him," is the Father's gift; but, as "a spoil which Christ divides unto himself," it is the fruit of his own conquests. In both these views we must regard the conversion of men to Christ. None, whether high or low, learned or unlearned, ever yield themselves up unfeignedly to him, but in consequence of their having been already given to him by the Father: "they make not themselves to differ; nor has one, more than another, aught, which he has not received." "As none *can* come unto Christ, except the Father draw them," so none *will* come to him, except God have both given them to Christ, and afterwards given to themselves an inclination and desire to be the Lord's. Nor is this a mere speculative truth; it lies at the very root of all religion: we never can be duly humbled till we see ourselves destitute of all will and ability to serve the Lord; and acknowledge from our hearts, that "it is God alone who giveth us either to will or to do" that which is good. Till then, we can

^c Ps. lxxii. 8—11.

never in sincerity refer all the glory of our salvation to God alone: we shall, of necessity, be assuming part of it to ourselves. Our Lord expressly mentions this truth no less than seven times in his intercessory prayer^d, which he uttered in the presence of his disciples. What greater proof of its importance can be given? And how needful is it for us also to remember it in all our addresses at the throne of grace!

It is further noticed in the text, that the conversion of men is also a fruit of the Redeemer's conquests. As Canaan, though given to Abraham and his posterity, was to be gained by the sword, so we, however given by the Father to Christ, must be rescued by force out of the hands of our enemies: if Christ will possess us as "a portion," he must take us as "a spoil." The god of this world had usurped a power over us, and, like a strong man armed, kept us under his controul. It was therefore necessary that Christ, who was "stronger than he, should overcome him, and take from him the armour wherein he trusted, and divide the spoils^e." Accordingly he engaged with all the powers of darkness, and, "by death, destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." On his cross "he spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." In his ascension "he led captivity itself captive;" and thus delivered us from the power of his great adversary. Not that his warfare is yet accomplished, though the form of it is altered; for he has still to subdue the rebellion of our hearts. We ourselves are up in arms against him: and, when driven out of one strong hold, we flee to another, till he has cast them all down, and swept away every refuge of lies. We yield not, till his arrows are fixed deeply in our hearts; we submit not, till he has "made us willing in the day of his power." Never, till his right hand and his holy arm have gotten him the victory, are our "thoughts and desires brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

^d John xvii.

^e Luke xi. 22.

By these united means then is Christ's kingdom to be extended: nor, when once they are combined, shall all the powers of earth and hell withstand their influence. However desperate the condition of any may appear, though they should have sold themselves to work iniquity, and become in a peculiar sense, "the lawful prey" of Satan, yet shall they be rescued, like Lot, from their victorious captors^f. This very difficulty is both stated and answered by the prophet: "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?" Yes; "Thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children^g."

Previous to the accomplishment of this promise, Christ was to purchase the Church with his own blood: "he was to make his soul an offering for sin, and, after that, to see a seed" given to him for a portion^h. Such was the tenour of the covenant which the Father entered into with his Son. But the prophet, foreseeing this work of Christ, *as it were already completed*, speaks of it as *if finished*; and states the execution of *his part* of the covenant, as the ground, on which he might expect the accomplishment of *the Father's part* towards him.

In further investigating this promise, it will be proper more fully to consider,

II. The grounds on which the fulfilment of it may be certainly expected—

The Lord Jesus has fulfilled his part of the covenant entered into with the Father. His death and intercession comprehend the whole of that work, which He was to perform on earth and in heaven for the redemption of man. And, they being *virtually* accomplished from the foundation of the world, our blessed Lord had a right to his purchase, and a claim upon the Father's honour for the performance of the engagements stipulated on his part.

^f Gen. xiv. 14—16.

^g Isai. xlix. 24, 25.

^h ver. 10.

In this view, *the death of Christ* is first mentioned in the text; “*Therefore will I divide him a portion, because he hath poured out his soul unto death.*” But it was not sufficient that Christ should die: he must die *in a particular manner, and for particular ends.* Was an atonement necessary to reconcile the Father to us? His death must be *sacrificial.* Was everlasting shame the portion we had merited? His death must be *ignominious.* Was it necessary for the honour of God’s government that sin should be punished in the sight of the whole universe? His death must be *judicial.* Now it was *in this very manner, and for these very ends,* that Jesus died. The sacrifices under the law had their blood shed, and poured out at the foot of the altar: and Jesus, our sacrifice, shed his blood from every pore of his body, and “poured out his soul unto death.” To mark the ignominy that he was to endure for us, “he was numbered with transgressors” of the most atrocious character, and crucified between two thieves; as though, instead of being the Lord of glory, he was the vilest of the human race. And, lastly, to make full satisfaction to Divine Justice, he died under a judicial sentence, bearing in his own person the load of our iniquities, and enduring the curse and condemnation due to the whole world.

Here then is one ground on which we may expect assuredly the conversion of sinners to him. Has he fulfilled *his* covenant engagements in every part, and shall *the Father* violate *his* engagements to him? Has he *performed his work,* and shall he not *receive his wages?* Has he *paid down the price,* and shall he not enjoy *his purchased possession?* Were *multitudes expressly given to him* on purpose that he might redeem them; and shall *they never partake* of his redemption? Was he himself exalted far above all principalities and powers, and *entrusted with gifts that he might bestow* them on the rebellious; yea, was all fulness of blessings committed to him on purpose that he might impart them, in rich abundance, to his ransomed people, and will he *not exercise his power* for these ends? We may be assured, that if there be any faithfulness in God the

Father, or any power in the Lord Jesus Christ, there shall be “a gathering of sinners to our adorable Shiloh.” The rich and powerful, as well as the poor and weak, shall turn unto him; they shall submit to his government, and devote themselves to his glory.

The other ground, on which the increase and aggrandizement of Christ’s kingdom may be expected, is *the intercession of Christ*; “*Therefore* will I divide him a portion, *because* he made intercession for the transgressors.” The intercession of Christ was that part of his work which he was to carry on in heaven, after he should have finished the work which was committed to him on earth. The high-priest, who typically represented Christ, was first to kill the sacrifice, then to carry the blood within the vail, and sprinkle it upon the mercy-seat, and then to burn incense before the mercy-seat: nor, till this last ceremony was performed, was the rest of any avail: it was not till after he had covered the mercy-seat with the clouds of incense, that he had any authority to bless the people. Thus was our Lord, not only to offer himself as a sacrifice for sin, and to enter into heaven with his own blood, but he was to make intercession for us at the right hand of God. *This was stipulated between the Father and him as one part of the condition, on which the conversion of sinners was to depend*; “Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possessionⁱ.” Now the prophet, seeing this part of Christ’s office, as it were, already fulfilled, declares its efficacy towards the salvation of men, and represents it as another ground for the performance of the Father’s promise. In this view the intercession of Christ is often mentioned in the Holy Scriptures. It is put altogether on a par with the death of Christ as the procuring cause of our salvation: it is said, “He died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification^k.” In one place a decided preference is given to it, as being, if possible, even more influential toward the acceptance of men than the death of Christ itself;

ⁱ Ps. ii. 8.

^k Rom. iv. 25.

“Who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea, *rather* that is risen again, who also maketh intercession for us¹.” His death is spoken of as effecting nothing without; “If Christ be not risen, we are yet in our sins; and they, who are fallen asleep in Christ, are perished^m.” nor is this all: his sufficiency for the wants and necessities of his people is represented as turning upon this hinge, and as standing altogether upon this ground; “He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, *seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them*.” Let his intercession then be considered in this view: did the Father hear him always when he was on earth, and will he not hear him now that he is in heaven? Did Moses, a sinner like ourselves, arrest, as it were, the arm of Omnipotence, and avert God’s vengeance from the idolatrous Jews^o, and shall not the prayers of Jesus prevail for us? Did the efficacy of his intercession appear on the day of Pentecost in the conversion of thousands, and shall it not be further manifested in the salvation of all whose cause he pleads? Surely, if we have but faith to believe, we may already see “the glory of the Lord risen upon the Church, and the Gentiles coming to her light, and *kings* to the brightness of her rising.”

Let us then LEARN from this subject two things; *the importance of Christ’s mediation, and the security of all who are interested in it—*

1. The importance of Christ’s mediation—

On this every thing depends: without *this*, there never had been a gleam of hope for any, whether rich or poor. Satan would have retained his power over us, and would have been to all of us, as it were, the jailer, to carry us to prison, and the executioner to inflict upon us the judgments we deserve. But because Christ poured out his soul unto death, our souls shall live for ever: because he was numbered

¹ Rom. viii. 34.

ⁿ Heb. vii. 25.

^m 1 Cor. xv. 17, 18.

^o Exod. xxxii.

with transgressors, we shall be numbered with the saints : because he bore our sins, we shall never have one sin laid to our charge : because he liveth to make intercession for us, we shall receive all the blessings of grace and glory. Let us then make his work our trust, our confidence, and our plea. Let us urge it with the Father on our behalf, that we may be given to Christ as his portion, and enjoyed by him as his spoil. Nor let us be discouraged by the thought that we are transgressors, as though the greatness of our transgressions were any bar to our acceptance ; for, it is *for* transgressors that he intercedes ; and, if we feel ourselves to be of that number (provided we hate and turn from our transgressions) we may be well assured, that our iniquity shall not be our ruin. “ Be wise therefore, O ye kings, be instructed, ye judges of the earth : *kiss the Son*, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way^p. ”

This subject may yet further SHEW us,

2. The security of those who are interested in Christ’s mediation—

The believer’s security depends not on the perfection of his own work, or the fidelity of his own promises, (for who does not see continual reason to lament his own imperfections and unfaithfulness ?) but rather on the perfection of Christ’s work, and the faithfulness of God. And who can find a flaw in either ? What is there that Christ has not done for the complete redemption of our souls ? Or who ever trusted in God and was confounded ? Let us not fear then though earth and hell conspire against us. Let us rather adopt the triumphant language of the Apostle, “ Who is he that shall lay any thing to our charge ? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth ? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who also maketh intercession for us.” We may rest satisfied that he is faithful, who hath promised ; and that, as the heroes of old hung up their trophies in

the temples of their gods, so Christ will take us to heaven as the fruit of his victories, the everlasting monuments of his power and grace. Let us then "hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end." Let us "believe in the Lord; so shall we prosper; let us believe his prophets; and so shall we be established."

DCCCCLXXVII.

OUR MAKER OUR HUSBAND.

Isai. liv. 5. *Thy Maker is thine Husband: the Lord of Hosts is his name.*

IN circumstances whether of personal or public difficulty it is well to bear in remembrance, that there is one who ordereth all things according to his own sovereign will, and who will never fail those who trust in Him. Doubtless the Jewish Church, at the time that the Prophet Isaiah wrote, and especially in the prospect of the Babylonish captivity which he predicted, was at a low ebb: but the prophet calls upon her to take comfort, in the sure and certain hope that God would fulfil to her all his promises, and enlarge her borders by the accession of unnumbered converts from among the Gentiles, who, in due season, should be received into her bosom, and aggrandize her in the eyes of the whole world. She might be assured of this; because, notwithstanding the bill of divorce which God had given her, he still considered himself as her husband; and because He, who was her God, was also "the God of the whole earth." In this promise we are interested, both as it respects ourselves and the world at large. I will therefore endeavour to unfold it to your view; and, for that end, will consider,

I. The general idea here suggested—

There is a peculiarity in the original which does not appear in the translation, which yet it is of great importance to observe. In the original it is, "Thy Makers are thine husband." It must be remembered,

that, at the first creation of man, it was said, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness^a.” In that passage it seems as if the formation of man was a matter in which the Three Persons of the Godhead concurred: and the same idea is evidently suggested in the passage before us. The same peculiarity occurs also in the Book of Ecclesiastes; where it is said, “Remember thy Creators in the days of thy youth^b.” Now, though these expressions mark a plurality of Persons in the Godhead, I should not think them *of themselves* sufficient to establish the doctrine of a Trinity in Unity: but when I find that doctrine so fully declared in other portions of Holy Writ, I cannot but regard these as very strongly *confirming* it. I feel that I can then account for, and explain, these peculiarities; which, without such a solution, must be utterly inexplicable.

But, not to dwell on the mere words, I will call your attention to the great subject contained in them: which indeed deserves the more attention, because there is not any one image in which our relation to God is more frequently or more strongly marked, than in that of marriage.

Look at it as stated in general terms—

[Both the Old Testament and the New alike abound with this figure. God declares, that he was the Husband of his Church in the wilderness^c. And, after he had put her away for her adulteries, he recalls her to him, saying, “Return unto me; for I am married unto you^d.” When our God incarnate came, even our Lord Jesus Christ, his forerunner, John the Baptist, pointed him out as the Bridegroom of his Church^e: and our Lord himself also assumed it as a title which he bore, and a character he sustained: “Can the children of the bridechamber fast whilst the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them: and then shall they fast in those days^f.” St. Paul enters into the subject at large, drawing a parallel between the duties of the marriage relation, as subsisting amongst men, and those which we owe to Christ as the Husband of the Church: and lest we should confine our attention exclusively to the former,

^a Gen. i. 26.

^b Eccl. xii. 1.

^c Jer. xxxi. 32.

^d Jer. iii. 14.

^e John iii. 29.

^f Matt. ix. 15.

which appeared to be primarily, if not solely, in his contemplation, he particularly adds, "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and his Church^g." But, to dwell on particular passages is needless; because a defection from God is, throughout the whole Scripture, called "adultery;" it being an alienation of heart from Him, whose right to it, as the Husband of his Church, is unalienable and universal.]

But look at it as more minutely and distinctly marked—

[Not to enter too minutely into a subject of such delicacy, we may notice his first choice of us, in order to the forming of this connexion with us. Verily, God's choice of us was altogether the result of his sovereign will and pleasure, without the slightest measure of respect to any goodness or worthiness in us^h. Having made us the objects of his choice, he "betrothed us to himself, in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies; yea, he even betrothed us to himself in faithfulnessⁱ," engaging, that "he would be for us only and exclusively, as we also should be exclusively for him^k." We have a further account of the very nuptials, and the feast attending them^l, and the consequent union consummated and confirmed^m. Further, the end of this union is declared; "We are married to Christ, that we may bring forth fruit unto Godⁿ."

All this is spoken of as commenced on earth: but it is yet further represented as completed in heaven; "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come:" (and, "Blessed are they which are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb^o:") and, "Come hither, and I will shew thee the Bride, the Lamb's Wife^p."]

I conceive that this is sufficient to shew how largely this subject is treated of in the Holy Scriptures; and, consequently, how much we are concerned to investigate,

II. The important particulars contained in it—

Of course we shall confine ourselves to those great and leading particulars which will best mark the dignity and importance of the subject. The relation, then, of Jehovah as a Husband to his Church, may be considered as comprehending,

^g Eph. v. 32.

^h Deut. vii. 7, 8.

ⁱ Hos. ii. 19, 20.

^k Hos. iii. 3.

^l Matt. xxii. 2. and xxv. 10.

^m Cant. ii. 4.

ⁿ Rom. vii. 4.

^o Rev. xix. 7, 9.

^p Rev. xxi. 9.

1. His union with us—

[By the constitution of marriage, as formed by God himself in Paradise, the husband and wife were declared to “be one flesh^a.” So, by virtue of this relation, as subsisting between Christ and his Church, we are not only one flesh with him, (for “we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones^t,”) but we are one spirit with him; as it is written, “He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit^s.” Now this is an union far closer than any other that can subsist on earth. Indeed it most resembles that which subsists in heaven between the different persons of the Godhead: as our Lord Jesus Christ has said; “I pray for them, that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” “that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one^t.” There is between him and them a mutual indwelling, such as no language can describe, and no finite imagination can conceive^u.]

2. His interest in us—

[Persons united in the marriage-bond have a mutual property in each other, and a mutual interest in every thing belonging to them. And thus it is between Christ and his believing people. The believer is Christ’s^x: and every thing which he possesses is Christ’s. “In no respect whatever is he his own^y:” from the moment of his union with Christ by faith, he was altogether “in spirit, soul, and body, sanctified unto the Lord^z.” The Lord Jesus Christ, also, has given himself over to the believing soul. The very weakest believer is authorized to say, “My Beloved is mine, and I am his^a.” Yes, verily, so it is; for “God is not ashamed to be called *our* God^b.” In truth, all that the Lord Jesus Christ *is*, and all that he *has*, becomes the property of the believing soul, and is all employed for his benefit. The wisdom, the power, the grace of the Lord Jesus are exerted in regulating the whole universe for his people’s good^c. Yea, “the very glory which his Father gave to him, he gives to them^d:” his throne is their throne, his crown their crown, his kingdom their kingdom^e: they are in every thing “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ^f.”]

3. His feelings towards us—

^a Gen. ii. 24.^r Eph. v. 30.^s 1 Cor. vi. 17.^t John xvii. 21, 22.^u John vi. 56.^x 1 Cor. iii. 23.^y 1 Cor. vi. 19.^z 1 Thess. v. 23.^a Cant. ii. 16.^b Heb. xi. 16.^c Eph. ii. 22.^d John xvii. 22.^e Rev. iii. 21.^f Rom. viii. 17.

[Not only will love be exercised by a husband in a way of fond endearment, but it will shew itself in all its diversified operations, according as circumstances shall arise to call it forth. Thus will the Lord Jesus Christ evince his love to us in every possible way. Not only will he “delight in us,” and “rejoice over us to do us good^g,” but he will sympathize with us in all our troubles^h, being himself afflicted in all our afflictionsⁱ,” no less than participating in all our joys^k. Certainly I feel, that, in speaking these things, there may appear to be a danger of exceeding the bounds of sobriety and truth: but God himself has taken the very image, and drawn the very parallel; and *that* so strongly, that we are in danger rather of falling short by reason of our ignorance and unbelief, than of exceeding through an over-heated imagination. “Thou shalt no more be termed, Forsaken; neither shall thy land be any more termed, Desolate: but thou shalt be called, Hephzi-bah; and thy land, Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and *thy land shall be married*. For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and *as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee^l*.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who, through grace, have been brought into this relation to the Deity—

[What terms can ever express the congratulations that are due to you? Would it be deemed a just ground of congratulation, if you were united in the nuptial bond to an earthly monarch? How then must I felicitate you on having for “your Husband, your Maker,” “the Lord of hosts,” “the God of the whole earth^m?” O! what honour has been conferred on you! and what blessings await you, both in time and in eternity! Remember what ye were when first he chose you: “Verily, your father was an Amorite, and your mother an Hittite: and in the day of your nativity you were cast out in the open field to the lothing of your person, in the day that you were born. And when he passed by you, and saw you polluted in your own blood, he said to you, Live: and then he entered into covenant with you, and made you hisⁿ.” Think, too, how often you have given him occasion to put you away for your unfaithfulness towards him, and by a bill of divorce to dismiss you for ever from his presence. But he is “a God of all grace,” and, for his own great name’s sake, has borne with you even to the present hour^o. Now, therefore, prepare

^g Jer. xxxii. 41.

^h Heb. iv. 15.

ⁱ Isai. lxiii. 9.

^k Zeph. iii. 17.

^l Isai. lxii. 4, 5.

^m ver. 5.

ⁿ Ezek. xvi. 3—8.

^o Ezek. xx. 9, 14, 22.

to fulfil your duties towards him, and to walk before him in newness of heart and life. Whilst you reflect on your privileges, be mindful also of your duties. And be careful never more to "grieve his Holy Spirit," or to "provoke him to jealousy," by even the appearance of evil. Remember what even a creature expects from her to whom he is joined in these sacred bonds; and let your every action, every word, and every thought, be such as shall approve itself to Him "who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins." In a word, be ye altogether his, even as ye would that he should be wholly and altogether yours.]

2. Those who know him not yet under this endearing character—

[O that I could prevail on every one of you to accept his gracious offers this day! Did Abraham send his servant to seek a wife for his son Isaac? Methinks I bear a similar commission from the God of heaven unto you. St. Paul says to the Corinthians, "I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ^p." And this is the object of my address to you this day. O that ye knew who it is that offers himself to you by my voice; and that ye considered how worthy He is of your affections! What is there that any one of you would desire in a husband? Do you admire *wisdom*? The Lord Jesus Christ is "the wisdom of God himself^q," Would you wish for *beauty*? "He is fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely^r." Have *riches* or *honours* any attractions in your eyes? "His riches are unsearchable^s," and "all the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth in him bodily^t." What is there in the whole creation that can vie with him? What is there that is in any degree worthy to be compared with him? Behold, it is "He who now stands at the door of your hearts, and knocks^u," and seeks admission into them. Know ye then the day of your visitation. "Refuse not Him who now speaks to you" by my voice^x, and says, "Give me thine heart^y." This only he requires, that you should renounce all others, and "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart." These are his very words, by which he now addresses you: "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear: forget also thine own people, and thy father's house: so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him^z." Accept his offers, beloved friends, and give yourselves unreservedly to him: so shall the

^p 2 Cor. xi. 2.

^q 1 Cor. i. 24.

^r Cant. v. 10, 16.

^s Eph. iii. 8.

^t Col. ii. 9.

^u Rev. iii. 20.

^x Heb. xii. 25.

^y Prov. xxiii. 26.

^z Ps. xlv. 10, 11.

very angels in heaven clap their wings with joy^a, and all the glory of heaven be made over to you as your everlasting inheritance.”]

^a Luke xv. 7, 10.

DCCCCLXXVIII.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO HIS COVENANT ENGAGEMENTS.

Isai. liv. 6—10. *The Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.*

THE covenant of grace, as securing to the believer all the blessings of time and eternity, is not considered by any means so much as the importance of it demands. There is in the minds of the generality, a jealousy respecting it, so that they can scarcely bear to hear the subject stated as it is in the Holy Scriptures. But we must not conceal any thing; and least of all should we keep back from you that which is the fountain and foundation of all the other blessings which you either have or hope for. Certain it is that there is a covenant, called in my text, “The covenant of God’s peace;” the provisions of which are here set before us with singular force and clearness.

The whole passage may be considered,

I. In reference to the Jewish Church—

[To them it primarily refers. The Jewish Church is here represented as a repudiated wife, put away for her unfaithfulness to her Maker, who calls himself “her husband^a.” Great and manifold were her offences against him: and most justly did she merit the displeasure with which on different occasions

^a ver. 5.

she was visited. In the days of the Judges she was often delivered up to her enemies, who oppressed her with the heaviest yoke of bondage: at last she was sent into captivity in Babylon: and at this hour is Jerusalem a desolation, having for eighteen centuries been trodden down of the Gentiles, and left without a temple, or priest, or sacrifice, or any ordinance whatever.

Yet is she not finally cast off. Her Divine Husband yet remembers *his* covenant-engagements, though she has forgotten *hers*; and *his* oath will he fulfil, though she has violated *hers* in ten thousand instances. His wrath against her, though so richly merited, is “small and transient;” whilst the mercies which he has prepared for her are “great” and “everlasting.” “He has yet thoughts of love and peace towards her;” and will in due season restore her to her former privileges; yea, and load her with benefits far beyond any which she ever before enjoyed. The very “sun shall be ashamed, and the moon confounded,” in the day that he shall visit her with his mercies; so utterly will all creature enjoyments be swallowed up and annihilated by the manifestations of his love^b — —

Of this he graciously assures her, by a two-fold representation; first, *in a way of comparison*, and then *in a way of contrast*. At the time of the deluge, God promised with an oath to Noah, that he would no more deluge the earth: and appointed the rainbow itself (which, as being a reflection of the rays of the sun from the drops of rain, marked the actual descent of rain at the time) to be a pledge that he would fulfil his word. *In like manner*, says God, “I have sworn to thee, that I will not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee” to thy utter ruin: and thou mayest regard the very afflictions with which I visit thee, as a pledge of thy future restoration: for “I will not make a full end of thee; though I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished^c.” Again: Of all things which may be deemed stable upon earth, the hills and the mountains may be regarded as the most firm and immovable: but, says God, the hills and mountains have been, and shall be, removed: but *it shall not be so with you*; for “the covenant of my peace shall never be removed.”

The manner in which God speaks of himself, whilst announcing this determination, is yet further worthy to be noticed: for he does not call himself by any name that would inspire fear and terror, but by names importing the most tender love: not “The Lord” *thy Creator*, *thy Governor*, *thy Judge*; but, “The Lord *thy Redeemer*,” “the Lord *that hath mercy on thee*.”

^b Isai. xxiv. 23. and xxx. 26. See the glories of that period described in ver. 11, 12. compared with Isai. ix. 13—22.

^c Jer. xxx. 11.

Now it is this view of the covenant which encourages us in all our efforts for the conversion of the Jews: for we know infallibly, that they are not cast off for ever; that they are still beloved of God for their fathers' sakes; and that in due time they shall be engrafted in again upon their own olive-tree, and experience, both in a temporal and spiritual view, such prosperity as they never yet enjoyed even under Solomon himself. Our trust is, not in any efforts of man, but in the power and fidelity of God. And though in their present condition they are as dry bones, very dry, reduced to dust, and scattered over the face of the earth, yet are we sure, that, by the simple preaching of the Gospel to them, they shall arise, a whole army^d. Yes, "the zeal of the Lord of Hosts will do this:" as we are assured by many similar declarations of the prophet Jeremiah^e — — —]

But the passage must also be explained,

II. In reference to the Christian Church—

We do not approve of limiting to the Church of Christ a multitude of prophecies which belong primarily to the Jewish Church. On the other hand, we must not rob the Christian Church of that interest which she has in them. It is observable, that the very first verse of this chapter is cited by St. Paul as applicable to the Christian Church^f: and at the close of the chapter all the rich promises contained in it are said to belong to her: "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord (whoever they may be); and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord^g." Now,

The Christian Church stands in the relation of a Spouse to Christ—

[So it is represented through the whole Book of Canticles. So it is declared by the Psalmist^h. The same is affirmed by our Lord himselfⁱ, and by all his Apostles^k — — —]

But too often does she provoke the Lord to hide his face from her—

[How often have the Church at large, and every member of it in particular, alienated their hearts from God, and adulterously placed on the creature those affections which were due

^d Ezek. xxxvii. 1, 2, 10.

^e Jer. xxxi. 35—37. and xxxiii. 23—26.

^f Gal. iv. 26, 27.

^g ver. 17.

^h Ps. xlv. 10, 11.

ⁱ Matt. ix. 15.

^k John iii. 29. Eph. v. 32. Rev. xxi. 9.

to him alone! — — — Too true is that accusation which he brings against us, that “we have played the harlot with many lovers¹” — — —

What then might we not expect, if God should deal with us according to our iniquities? What, but that he should cast us off, and swear in his wrath that we should never more be received into his favour?]

Yet still does “God remember his covenant” towards her—

[“He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever.” He will not break his covenant, though we have broken ours: nor will he violate his oath, though we have violated ours times without number. “He will visit our transgressions with the rod, and our iniquity with stripes:” (and, if the chastening us with whips will not suffice, he will “chastise us with scorpions, even seven-fold more, for our sins^m): “nevertheless his loving-kindness will he not utterly take from us, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail: his covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips: for once he has sworn by his holiness that he will not lie unto Davidⁿ.” He knew what we were, and what we should be also, if left to ourselves, before he chose us: yet did he bid us live, and spread his skirt over us, and entered into covenant with us^o. It was on this very account that he in his covenant undertook to do for us all that related either to the pardoning of our guilt, or to the sanctifying of our nature^p: and engaged, not only never to depart from us, but never to leave us to depart from him^q. Of all this he has assured us by promise and by oath, on purpose that by “these two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have the strongest consolation, if we have fled for refuge to the hope that is set before us^r.” If our continuance in his favour had depended altogether on our stability, who would ever be saved at last? (It is of *the grounds* of our security that we are now speaking, and not of *the means*: of *them* we shall speak in another place.) Our final stability must be the work of his grace, as much as our first inclination to serve him: all our good works from first to last must be wrought in us by him^s: and when he chose us, he chose us to *the end*, and to *the means*; or rather *to the end by the means*^t: and “his gifts and calling are without repentance^u.” Our security then rests

¹ Jer. iii. 1.

ⁿ Ps. lxxxix. 33—35.

^p Jer. xxxi. 11, 12.

^r Heb. vi. 17, 18.

^t 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.

^m 1 Kings xii. 11. Lev. xxvi. 18.

^o Ezek. xvi. 6, 8. Isai. xlvi. 8.

^q Jer. xxxii. 39—41.

^s Isai. xxvi. 12.

^u Rom. xi. 29.

upon the unchangeableness of our God^x, “whose compassions fail not^y,” and “with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning^z.” I again repeat, that he may hide himself from us, and for a long period too, as it may appear to us; for it is both his right and his property to do so^a: but “his anger” will endure but for “a little moment;” and though our “weeping may endure for a night, joy shall come to us in the morning^b.”]

In a REVIEW of this subject,

1. Let none, however desolate their condition may be, indulge despair—

[This is the true use to be made of this important subject. Let not Jews despair of being restored to the favour of their God; but let them plead with God, as their forefathers did^c — — — and accept the invitation which God himself has given them to return unto him^d.

Nor let Christians who are under the hidings of God's face despond. Let not any of you ask, like David, “Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? This were only to betray your own infirmity^e,” and to shew your utter ignorance of God^f — — —

You will say then, What shall we do? I answer, Lay hold on God's covenant, and look to him to fulfil every part of it. Approach your God with penitential sorrow, as the Church of old did; “We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against thee. Yet do not abhor us, for thy name's sake; do not disgrace the throne of thy glory; remember, *break not thy covenant with us^g*.” See how David pleaded under similar circumstances^h: and resolve, as the Prophet Isaiah teaches you, “I will wait upon the Lord that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for himⁱ.”]

2. Let none, however confident of their state before God, be guilty of presumption—

[Of the book of God's decrees we know nothing, but as it is made visible by facts. Respecting any man's election to

^x Mal. iii. 6.

^y Lam. iii. 22.

^z Jam. i. 17.

^a Isai. xlv. 15.

^b Ps. xxx. 5.

^c Isai. lxiii. 15, 16.

^d Jer. iii. 12—14.

^e Ps. lxxvii. 7—10.

^f Isai. xl. 28—31. and xlix. 14—16.

^g Jer. xiv. 20, 21.

^h Ps. xxvii. 9.

ⁱ Isai. viii. 17.

eternal life, we can judge only by his works. One thing is clear; that "he who committeth sin is of the devil;" and "he that doeth not righteousness is not of God^k." Hence, if we are living in the wilful commission of any one sin, or habitual neglect of any one duty, we have no ground whatever to imagine that we are of the number of God's elect. To fancy therefore that a work of grace has been begun in us, and to conclude from thence that God will carry it on unto the end, whilst daily experience proves that it is not carrying on, but that we are the willing slaves of sin and Satan, is only to deceive our own souls, and to surrender up ourselves an easy prey into the hands of our great adversary. Our wisdom is, to seek an union with the Lord Jesus Christ by faith; and not to be dreaming of privileges which we do not possess: for, as it is certain, on the one hand, that no man can be saved who lives in any allowed sin, so it is equally certain, on the other hand, that no one can ever perish who flees to Christ for refuge, and relies altogether upon him for "wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption." This then must be our daily work: and so far is the covenant of grace from superseding this duty, that it affords us our greatest encouragement to perform it; because it assures us, that we shall "never seek God's face in vain," and that "they who trust in him shall never be confounded." Whilst therefore I would say to the trembling Believer, Look to "*the covenant*," which is ordered in all things and sure^l," and expect God to fulfil all the promises of it to your souls; to the Unbeliever I would say, Look to *the Lord Jesus Christ*, to wash you from your guilt, and to renew you by his Spirit. Respecting the provisions of the covenant trouble not yourselves, till you have an evidence in your own souls that you desire deliverance from sin as much as freedom from condemnation: and get your souls well instructed in a thorough experience of the first principles of repentance and faith, before you presume to build your hopes either on the secret decrees of heaven, or on any fallacious arguments deduced from them.]

^k 1 John iii. 8, 10.

^l 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

DCCCCLXXIX.

PEACE THE FRUIT OF DIVINE TEACHING.

Isai. liv. 13. *All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.*

THE Jewish Church was often in a state of great distress, under the judgments of Almighty God. In

Babylon especially was she at the lowest ebb of degradation and misery. But there was consolation provided for her in a prospect of glorious times, when her light, and peace, and joy, and purity, should far exceed any thing which she had ever experienced in her most prosperous state; and the whole Gentile world also should be made partakers of her blessedness.

In the words before the text, the Jewish Church is represented as a tent or tabernacle torn and “tossed by the winds,” and reduced to a most desolate condition: and a promise is given to her, that God will build her as a palace, every part of which shall be composed of precious stones; her foundations being of sapphires, her windows of agates, her gates of carbuncles, and even her borders, or outward walls, of pleasant stones^a. In her former state, her whole service consisting of rites and ordinances; she was forced to receive her instructions from *men*, whose peculiar duty was to ascertain and execute the will of God in every one of his appointments: and in the performance of these burthensome rites there was but *little satisfaction* to the soul. But in the state to which she was encouraged to look forward, a different system was to prevail: the instruction that was to be conveyed was spiritual; and a compliance with it was to be attended with much delight. Hence it was said to her, “All thy children shall be taught of *God*: and *great* shall be the *peace* of thy children.”

The promises here made to the Church relate to the two things which were chiefly wanted under that shadowy dispensation; namely,

I. Divine illumination—

This is a blessing which every human being needs—

[We may obtain from men and books a speculative knowledge of religion, as well as of any other science: but a spiritual discernment can be given us by God alone. This is declared by an inspired Apostle: “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned^b.” In like manner our blessed Lord testifies: “All

^a ver. 11, 12.

^b 1 Cor. ii. 14.

things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him^e."

How far this is true or false, it is in the power of every man to ascertain, by his own experience. Let it be tried. Of the leading truths of the Gospel we may suppose the generality of persons to be convinced: they know, that they are sinners; that they need a Saviour; that a Saviour has been provided for them; that a promise of salvation is given to all who will believe in him; and that on those who reject his overtures of mercy the guilt of all their sins must rest for ever. Now then let any man sit down to consider these truths: let him call in the aid of all the most competent instructors he can find: and let him see whether he can, by any efforts of his own, bring himself to a *spiritual perception* of those truths, that is, to such a view of them as shall produce a suitable impression on his mind, and a corresponding effect upon his heart and life. Let him labour as long as he shall see fit: and, after the fullest possible trial, let him declare, whether he has been able to produce in his soul the feelings which were excited in the bosoms of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost; and in his whole spirit and temper the same permanent change. If one single person in the universe be found that can effect this, then we are content to acknowledge, that our assertions on this subject are erroneous, and that man does not need the teachings of God's Spirit in order to a spiritual perception of divine truth. But if no such instance ever was, or can be, found, then may we be assured, that "flesh and blood cannot reveal these things" to our souls, and that we can know them only by the teaching of God himself^d.]

This however is promised to us in the Gospel—

[The Spirit of God has undertaken to impart it to our souls. His particular office in the economy of Redemption is, "to testify of Christ^e," and "to glorify Christ by taking of the things that are his, and shewing them unto us^f." And in the execution of this office he "convinces the soul of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment^g;" and so convinces of these things as to produce in the soul all the diversified sensations which they are suited to create.

If it be asked, What evidence does any one give, whereby it may be ascertained, whether this promised influence be a reality or a delusion? I answer, This also may be brought to a visible test, by which the whole world may judge of it.

^e Matt. xi. 27.

^d Matt. xvi. 17.

^e John xv. 26.

^f John xvi. 14.

^g John xvi. 7—11.

The man who truly experiences this teaching, immediately comes to Christ as a sinner, and with deep humiliation and contrition seeks salvation through him alone. This our blessed Lord himself affirms; and affirms it too with *an express reference to the words of our text*: “It is written in the Prophets,” says he, “They shall be all taught of God. *Every man* therefore that hath heard and learned of the Father, *cometh unto me*^h.” There is no exception under heaven: the effect of this teaching is invariable and universal. Nay more, it produces a holy energy and determination of mind to come to Christ at all events, and to disregard all the consequences that such a step can possibly involve. This may be seen in the conduct of the Apostle Paul, who says, “When it pleased God, who called me by his grace, *to reveal his Son in me*, immediately *I conferred not with flesh and blood*ⁱ,” but proceeded to adopt such measures as I judged most calculated to advance his glory.

This teaching therefore, though invisible in itself, even as the wind, is yet, like the wind, visible in its effects: and “*all* the children of Zion” are privileged to experience it in their souls. The weakest person in the whole creation shall enjoy it, if he will but seek it in faith and prayer. Yes: “what God has hid from the wise and prudent, he will reveal unto babes; even so, because it seemeth good in his sight^k.”]

Connected with this blessing is,

II. Heavenly peace—

Men, without any Divine teaching, possess what they *call* peace: but it is a state which does not deserve the name of peace, seeing that it is nothing but a stupid insensibility, issuing from a forgetfulness of all their spiritual concerns. Speak to them of death, and judgment, heaven and hell, and their peace vanishes in a moment; and they are ready to desire, like Satan, that they “may not be tormented before their time^l.” But the peace which Christ bestows, and which he emphatically calls *his*^m, is of a very different kind: it is a *positive* sense of acceptance with God, and a rest of the soul in God. This the Believer experiences,

1. In the view of all his past sins—

[So far is he from being appalled by a sight of his sins, that he desires to have them set before him in all their

^h John vi. 45.

ⁱ Gal. i. 15—17.

^k Matt. xi. 25.

^l Matt. viii. 29.

^m John xiv. 27.

malignity, and with all their numberless aggravations. He feels that a sense of his disease is necessary to an enjoyment of the remedy: and the more he sees his own guilt and helplessness, the more he glories in Christ as a suitable and all-sufficient Saviour. The very impossibility of being saved in any other way than through the blood and righteousness of Christ, constrains him to look altogether to Christ, as "the very chief of sinners," who shall to all eternity be held forth as a specimen of what the grace of God could effectⁿ. The thought that the extent and riches of redeeming love will be pre-eminently displayed in him, perfectly reconciles him to the idea of having all his sins exposed before the assembled universe; since the Saviour will be most glorified in those whom he has redeemed from the deepest death. Let me not however be mistaken. The believer is not indifferent to his past sins; (for he mourns over them to his dying hour:) much less does he think it a desirable thing for a person to commit great sins in order that Christ may be magnified in the forgiveness of them; (for that would be to make Christ himself "a minister of sin^o:" but seeing that his sins have been great, he derives consolation from the thought, that "where sin has abounded, the grace of Christ shall much more abound; and that, as sin has reigned unto death, even so shall grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord^p."]]

2. In the view of all his present infirmities—

[These would quite overwhelm his spirits, if his eyes were not opened to see on what "a Mighty One help had been laid for him^a." He could not hope to maintain his peace one hour, but that he knows he has an Advocate with the Father, ever ready to intercede for him; and that that very "Advocate is also a propitiation for all his sins^r." In Christ too he beholds a fulness of grace treasured up for him; of grace ever ready, and all-sufficient for him, in his greatest necessities. Hence, so far from being discouraged by a sense of his weakness, he even derives consolation and encouragement from it; just as St. Paul did, who says, "I *take pleasure* in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong^s." The thought that "the strength of Christ will be made perfect," and manifested to be perfect, "in his weakness," turns the sense which he has of his weakness into a ground of joy, and makes him even to "glory in his infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon him^t."]]

ⁿ 1 Tim. i. 16.

^o Gal. ii. 17.

^p Rom. v. 20, 21.

^q Ps. lxxxix. 19.

^r 1 John ii. 2.

^s 2 Cor. xii. 10.

^t 2 Cor. xii. 9.

3. In the view of the final judgment—

[The bar of judgment is no longer an object of dread and terror to his soul. “He knows in whom he has believed; and is persuaded that he is able to keep that which he has committed to him.” He has no fear that God will forget his promises, or that the Saviour who bought him with his blood, and furnished him with continual supplies of grace, will give him up to that destroyer, from whose power he has rescued him at so great a price. He looks on that day as the time appointed for his complete deliverance. He knows that *then* the body, which has here been such a clog to his soul, shall be made a partaker with the soul in all the glory and felicity of heaven. He looks forward therefore to it with joy. It is as much the object of hope to him, as the first advent of the Saviour was to the Jewish Church. How delightful is it to him to contemplate the wonders of that day; to behold the Saviour coming in all the glory of his Father, and all his holy angels with him; to behold him seated on his judgment-seat, and, ordering to either hand the sheep and the goats; to hear him pronounce the sentence upon each; and then to ascend with him in sweet anticipation to the realms of bliss; to be seated on his throne; to behold his glory in all its brightness; to hear his voice, to taste his love, to participate his glory; and to spend eternity in songs of praise! All this is delightful to the believer’s soul; and in the anticipation of it he already possesses a foretaste of the heavenly bliss.

With these views “his peace is *great* :” yes verily, he has “a peace that passeth all understanding^x :” and “rivers of it flow into his soul^y,” being “filled with all joy and peace in believing, and abounding in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost^z.”]

SEE then, Brethren,

1. What blessings are treasured up for you in the Gospel—

[It is to “Zion’s Children” that these blessings are limited: and how are you to be brought into that relation to her, but by the Gospel? Know that, if you submit yourselves truly to the voice of God in his word, all these blessings are yours: you shall have that “unction of the Holy One that shall teach you all things^a ;” and you shall possess the consolations of the Spirit, which are neither few nor small^b. But remember, that “God will be inquired of,” before he will impart them to you^c :

^u 2 Tim. i. 12.

^x Phil. iv. 6.

^y Isai. xlvi. 17, 18.

^z Rom. xv. 13.

^a 1 John ii. 20, 27.

^b Job xv. 11. Jer. xxx. 19.

^c Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

it is by the holy violence of prayer that they must be brought down from heaven; and by the appropriating energy of faith that they must be made available for your salvation — — —]

2. How injurious are the workings of unbelief—

[Unbelief puts far from us the promises of God, under an idea that we have no title to them; and deprives the soul of all the happiness which it is privileged to enjoy. In vain does God say, “*All*” thy children shall be taught of God: for unbelief has found out some reason for an exception in this or that particular person. In vain has God said, “*Great shall be the peace*” of thy children: for unbelief suggests, that trouble and fear are more suited to the case of this particular individual. I do not mean to say, that wilful and habitual sin is not a bar both to the teachings and consolations of the Spirit: for *that* will assuredly cut off all gracious communications from us; as it is said, “*Your iniquities have separated between you and your God^d.*” but, if we truly turn to God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, no past iniquities are any bar to our acceptance with him; nor are any present infirmities a ground for desponding fears; seeing that there is a sufficiency in Christ for all our wants; and our very necessities afford him a more glorious occasion for magnifying himself in our support. Dismiss then all doubts and fears respecting your right to apprehend the promises of God, or your title to expect his promised blessings. Only “*be strong in faith, giving glory to God^e;*” and “*according to your faith it shall be done unto you^f.*”]

^d Isai. lix. 2.

^e Rom. iv. 20.

^f Matt. ix. 29.

DCCCCLXXX.

THE SAINT'S HERITAGE.

Isai. liv. 17. *No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment, thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord: and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.*

THE Scriptures uniformly suppose men to be, not only in a state of sin, but, to a certain degree, in a state of misery also, being more or less agitated with “*fightings without, and fears within.*” The very people of God themselves are not exempt from this common lot. The difference between them and

others consists not in a freedom from trouble, but in consolations and supports which they alone enjoy. They have a God to go to; a God who tenderly sympathizes with them in all their troubles, and “in all their afflictions is himself afflicted^a.” From Him they receive the most consolatory promises, and generally in language that precludes a possibility of their doubting to whom those promises are made. Are they under the actual pressure of the deepest sorrow? He addresses them as in that very state, and characterizes them by the very tribulations which they endure. “O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted,” behold, I will interest myself in all thy concerns; and “no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper.”

These words will lead me to set before you,

I. The heritage of God's servants—

Three things are here specified as their unalienable portion;

1. Protection from danger—

[From the very beginning, they have been objects of hatred both to men and devils, who have combined their efforts for their destruction. From the days of Cain, the followers of Abel's piety have been persecuted by their envious and malignant brethren; whilst “Satan, as a roaring lion, has gone about, seeking to devour them”— — —

But we need not fear the assaults of either: for God has engaged, in reference to his Church at large, that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it^b,” and, in reference to every individual believer, that “none shall pluck them out of his hand^c.” “It is not his will that one of his little ones should perish^d.”]

2. Vindication from calumny—

[What efforts have been made to destroy the character of God's people may be seen in the account given of them by Haman to Ahasuerus: “There is a certain people scattered abroad, and dispersed among the people, in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people, neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be

^a Isai. lxiii. 9.

^b Matt. xvi. 18.

^c John x. 28—30.

^d Matt. xviii. 14. Luke xii. 32.

written that they may be destroyed^e." They still, as formerly, are a sect that is everywhere spoken against; nor is there "*any manner of evil* which will not be laid falsely to their charge^f." But God does often, in a wonderful way, interpose for them, to the vindicating of their character, and the confusion of all their enemies^g. Indeed, the very people who most bitterly traduce them, often venerate them in their hearts; even as "Herod feared John, from an inward conviction that he was a just and holy man^h." But, however God may suffer his people to be treated "as the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all thingsⁱ" even to their dying hour, there is a time coming when he will appear in their behalf: and, if man have his *day*, God will have his *day* also^k; and will bring forth their righteousness as the light, and their judgment as the noon-day^l."]

3. Justification from all sin—

[In two ways will God justify his people: the one is, by an authoritative attestation from the mouth of their Judge; the other, by putting upon them that very righteousness whereby they shall be justified. The Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, has wrought out "a righteousness which shall be unto all and upon all them that believe^m:" and when they are arrayed in this, "God sees in them no iniquityⁿ," because he has "blotted it out from the book of his remembrance," and "cast it all behind him, into the very depths of the sea^o." "If it be sought for ever so diligently, it cannot be found^p;" for they are before God without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, yea, holy, and without blemish^q." "This is the blessed heritage of all God's servants;" and all of them in due time shall possess it.]

That we may the better estimate their felicity, let us notice,

II. Their security for the possession of it—

It is altogether "of God," as our text declares; and all the perfections of God are pledged for their ultimate possession of it. It is secured to them by,

1. The power of God—

^e Esth. iii. 8, 9.

^f Matt. v. 11.

^g 1 Sam. xxiv. 17.

^h Mark vi. 20.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iv. 13.

^k 1 Cor. iv. 3—5. See the Greek.

^l Ps. xxxvii. 5, 6. Isai. lxvi. 5.

^m Rom. iii. 22.

ⁿ Numb. xxiii. 21.

^o Mic. vii. 19. and Isai. xxxviii. 17.

^p Jer. l. 20.

^q Eph. v. 27.

[Respecting this, there is particular mention made in the preceding context. God warns his people that they must expect persecution from an ungodly world. "Behold! they shall surely gather together, but not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee, shall fall for thy sake." But how shall the conspiracy of God's enemies be defeated? How? God himself tells us: "I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth his instrument for his work: and I have created the waster to destroy." Has He then created both the man who made the weapon, and the man that uses it; and can he not controul both the one and the other, so that the weapon shall effect only what he sees fit to permit? Let the servants of God, then, consider this: their enemies are all in the hands of God, even of *their* God; and "they can have no power whatever, except that which is given them from above." What need then have the saints to fear? Who can get access to those whom God "hides in the secret place of his tabernacle?" or, "Who can, with any effect, be against them, when He is for them?" "His name is a strong tower; and the righteous, who have run to it, are safe."]

2. The goodness and veracity of God—

[They have given themselves to him, as "his servants:" and will he forget them? Will He who "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust," refuse protection to those who have exposed themselves to sufferings for his sake? He has promised to them, that "he will render to them according to their works:" and "has He said, and will he not do it? has He spoken, and will he not make it good?" He would even account himself "unrighteous, if he were to forget their works and labours of love, which they have shewed towards his name." We may be sure, therefore, that, if tried in the fire, they shall "come out of it purified as gold; and that, however tempted, "they shall never perish, but shall have eternal life."]

Now let me ask,

1. Who, besides the saints, possesses any such heritage as this?

[If we had crowns and kingdoms, they were not worthy to be compared with this — — —]

2. Who ever confided in this promise, and was disappointed of his hope?

[Your fears may have been great, and your conflicts severe : but were you ever forsaken of your God? No: you must all bear testimony to his fidelity, even as Israel did of old; for “ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you : all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof^s.”]

^s Josh. xxiii. 14.

DCCCCLXXXI.

EXHORTATION TO RECEIVE THE BLESSINGS OF THE GOSPEL.

Isai. lv. 1—3.—*Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me : hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*

WE can never sufficiently admire the condescension and grace of God in noticing such insignificant and worthless creatures as we are. That he should provide for our returning wants, and permit us to ask of him the things we stand in need of, may well excite our deepest astonishment. But that he should be as much interested in our welfare, as if his own happiness and glory depended on it, seems utterly incredible : yet, that this is really the case, is manifest from the earnest invitations and entreaties, which he uses to prevail upon us to accept of mercy. In confirmation of this, we need only notice the passage before us, in which God, with inexpressible affection, labours to awaken the attention of sinners to their own truest happiness, and to bring them to the enjoyment of everlasting salvation.

In his words we may observe,

I. An invitation—

No words could be devised that should more forcibly declare God's desire for our welfare—

[The blessings of the Gospel are here set forth under the most natural and expressive images. What can be more refreshing than water? more reviving than wine? more nutritious than milk? yet do these but faintly represent the operations of the Gospel on the soul of man. Nor can water or milk be by any means dispensed with; they are altogether necessary for human subsistence: so that on this account also are they fit emblems of spiritual blessings. What would be the state of man if there were no Saviour to atone for him, no Spirit to renew him, no God and Father to preserve and bless him? On the contrary, how revived and animated is he by the promises of pardon and peace, of holiness and glory! Such then are the blessings which God offers to mankind. And to a participation of them he invites every one that thirsteth: every person, whatever have been his character or conduct, is called: if only he thirst, nothing shall be a bar to his acceptance. Yet no man needs to decline the invitation, under the idea that he is not welcome, because he does not thirst enough: if he be willing, *that* is sufficient^a. Nor need any one be discouraged at the thought that he has nothing wherewith to purchase these benefits: for though they are to be bought, it is “without money and without price;” and *therefore* they “who have no money” are particularly specified in the invitation. Indeed, if any man bring a price in his hand, he shall surely go empty away: Christ has paid the price; nor can we obtain any thing, unless we be willing to receive it as the free gift of God through Christ.

The earnestness with which God entreats us to accept these blessings, is well worthy of our notice. He personates a herald standing in the place of public concourse, and, in the accustomed manner, calling the attention of all around him. He then expatiates on the blessings which he is ready to communicate, and the terms on which he will bestow them: he describes the persons to whose necessities the blessings are suited, and to whose indigence the terms are more especially adapted: and then, as though he were determined to take no refusal, he cries, “Come,” “come,” “come!”]

And shall we despise such a gracious invitation?

[Let us but contemplate the blessings we are invited to partake of: how rich, how suitable, how necessary! — — — Let us reflect on the terms on which they are offered: can any thing be more reviving? — — — Let us recollect who it is that calls us: Is he used to mock his people? or is he incapable of supplying all their wants? — — — Let us consider his description of the persons invited: can any thing be more encouraging?

^a So St. John expounds the passage, Rev. xxii. 17.

and shall we not be inexcusable if we turn a deaf ear to such entreaties? — — —]

But God, knowing our extreme backwardness to go to him, urges us yet further by,

II. An expostulation—

Our infatuation justly calls for a severe reproof—

[The contemnners of God's invitations may be comprised under two classes, the worldly-minded, and the self-righteous. Both of these despise the offers of the Gospel; the one, because they have no relish for spiritual things; the other, because they think they already possess them: the one find their happiness in the pursuit and enjoyment of earthly things; the other in self-applauding reflections on their own goodness. But we may appeal to both, whether they have ever attained any abiding satisfaction in their respective courses? Have pleasures, riches, or honours ever proved a source of solid peace? Are they "bread" proper for the *soul*? Does not the comfort, derived from such things, fail us in the hour that we most need it? And will any satisfaction arise from the remembrance of them, when we stand at the bar of judgment? Nor however laudable the conduct of the self-righteous may be in the sight of men, can it yield them the comfort they aspire after: it cannot satisfy either God or their own consciences; not God, because it does not fulfil the demands of his Law; not themselves, because they never can know that they have done enough to procure them acceptance with God: in the midst of all their boasted confidence, they have many misgiving fears lest they should have laboured for nought, and "spent their money for that which is not bread."

To impress this thought on our minds, God contrasts the blessings he offers with those which we foolishly prefer. He calls them "good," and declares that they will "delight the soul with fatness." And are they not *good*? What so worthy of this character, as a free and full pardon to the guilty; a peace that passeth all understanding to the troubled; renewed strength to the weak; and everlasting glory to the lost? Can these be received into the soul, and not comfort it? or can they be promised to us by a faithful God, and not satisfy the mind? Surely they are "meat indeed, and drink indeed;" nor can they fail of filling us with "joy unspeakable and glorified."]

Let us then call ourselves to an account for our conduct—

[Who amongst us has not had abundant experience of the insufficiency of every thing except the Gospel, to make us happy? And shall we yet persist in our error? shall we never

cease to "hew out to ourselves broken cisterns," when we may have access to "the fountain of living waters?" shall we still grasp at a shadow, while we lose the substance? ——— "*Wherefore*" act we thus? What reason can we assign to ourselves for such obstinacy? and what shall we assign to God, when he shall interrogate us respecting it in the day of judgment? shall we plead a want of information? God has informed us. Shall we say that the blessings of salvation were out of our reach? God has freely offered them to every one of us: nor can any thing but a deliberate rejection of his mercy ever finally destroy us — — —]

Lest any thing should be wanting to affect our hearts, God confirms his invitation with,

III. A promise—

There is not any thing which God will not do for those who obey his call—

[Whatever a carnal man may enjoy, he has no right or title to eternal life. On the contrary, whatever a spiritual man may want, this privilege he shall assuredly possess, "his soul shall live." Nor shall this life be terminated like the life of the body; for God will make a covenant with him, "an everlasting covenant," a "covenant ordered in all things and sure;" so that every thing necessary for the maintaining and perfecting of this life shall be secured to him. And as the Father gave unto his Son "the sure mercies of David" by raising him from the dead, and setting him at his own right hand in heaven^b, so will he bestow on his believing people every thing that he ever promised unto his Church. Notwithstanding he may suffer them for a time to be reduced to a most forlorn and desperate condition, as was the state of Christ when enclosed in the tomb, his mercies shall be "sure" to all his seed, and every soul amongst them shall in due season be exalted to a throne of glory in heaven.

Lest we should still remain unmoved, God calls our attention to this promise, repeating his entreaties with all the energy and affection that words can express. "Hearken," says he, 'as to a distant sound which you are solicitous to hear: hearken "diligently," not suffering any thing to divert your attention for one moment: "incline your ear" as one that is afraid of losing a single word that is spoken to him: "hear," determining to judge with candour, and to follow the dictates of sound wisdom. Do this,' says God, 'and the promise shall be yours: I pledge myself by covenant and by oath that your soul shall live, and that nothing that is good shall be wanting to you either in time or in eternity.']

^b Acts xiii. 34.

How incurably obstinate then must we be, if such accumulated means be used in vain !

[Is the life of the soul a matter of such indifference, that a promise of it shall have no effect on our minds? Shall God engage himself to us by covenant and by oath to supply all our need both of body and soul, and shall we account his word unworthy of our attention? — — — Who ever experienced his blessings, and found them of no value? or whom has he ever deceived, that we dare not trust him? — — — Let us at least remember what an alternative we prefer; we reject life, and happiness, and glory, and embrace death and misery as our eternal portion — — — O that God might prevail at last! that we might now accept his gracious offers; and be made partakers of present and everlasting felicity !]

DCCCCLXXXII.

CHRIST A WITNESS AND COMMANDER.

Isai. lv. 4.—*Behold, I have given him for a Witness to the people, a Leader and Commander to the people.*

AMONGST the various means which God used for the spiritual benefit of his ancient people, one was, to provoke them to jealousy, by declaring, that the blessings which they so abused should be transferred to another people, who would make a more suitable improvement of them. From the beginning he warned them of this by Moses : “ They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation^a.” Our blessed Lord and his Apostles frequently had recourse to this expedient: and St. Paul tells us, that he had used it, not to irritate his countrymen, but, if possible, to save them^b. The Prophet Isaiah had this object in view, in the passage before us. He has been expostulating with the Jewish people on their folly and impiety in not seeking after the blessings of salvation, and especially those blessings which God had covenanted to bestow

^a Deut. xxxii. 21.

^b Rom. xi. 11, 15.

upon them through their exalted Messiah^c; and he tells them, that God had given this Messiah, not, as they imagined, to them only, but to the whole Gentile world; who would eventually run to him, and embrace him, and become the heirs of those benefits, which the ungrateful Israelites neglected and despised.

That it is the Messiah who is here spoken of, there can be no doubt. He is often designated by the name of David^d: and “an unspeakable gift” he is to a ruined world^e.

We propose to shew,

I. For what ends he is given—

Doubtless he was sent for the salvation of man; according as it written, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but should have everlasting life^f.” But there are two ends of his incarnation specified in the text; to which therefore we will confine our attention. He was given,

1. “To be a Witness to the people”—

[God had from all eternity devised a plan for the redemption of the world through the sufferings of his only-begotten Son. And of this plan the Lord Jesus Christ came to testify. For this office he was well qualified; having concerted the plan together with his Father; as it is written, “The counsel of peace was between them both^g.”

Of this stupendous mystery the Lord Jesus testified by the Prophets, hundreds of years before he came into the world. Not one word of all that they delivered on this momentous subject proceeded from themselves: “they spoke only as they were moved by the Holy Ghost^h,” and as they were instructed “by an immediate inspiration from Godⁱ.” The Spirit by whose sacred agency they were moved, was “the Spirit of CHRIST:” as St. Peter says; “The Prophets, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto us, searched what, or what manner of time, *the Spirit of CHRIST* did signify, when it *testified* beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow^k.” Here both *the subject* and *the author* of their

^c Compare ver. 3. with Acts xiii. 34.

^d Jer. xxx. 9. Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. Hos. iii. 5.

^e 2 Cor. ix. 15.

^f John iii. 16.

^g Zech. vi. 13.

^h 2 Pet. i. 21.

ⁱ 2 Tim. iii. 16.

^k 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

testimony are declared to be precisely such as we have affirmed. It was of the wonders of redemption that they testified; and the Author of their testimony was JESUS CHRIST.

In due time he came down from heaven, and testified of these things in his own person. He had from all eternity been "in the bosom of his Father¹," and was privy to every thing which the Father had ordained^m: and at the appointed season he came, "as a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the Fathersⁿ:" as St. John informs us; "He that cometh from heaven is above all: and what he hath seen and heard, that he *testifieth*^o." The light which he cast on this mystery was far greater than that which had been given to the Jewish Church: yet the time was not come for the full disclosure of it: he had many things to say, which the people could not hear whilst he was yet sojourning on earth, because the mystery itself yet remained to be accomplished, by his death, and resurrection, and ascension.

He therefore afterwards bore a fuller testimony by his Apostles; who, through that "unction of the Holy One who taught them all things" and "brought all things to their remembrance," "testified of the Gospel of the grace of God^p," and "declared the whole counsel of God" respecting it. To this effect St. John says; "We have seen, and *do testify*, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world^q." The record was the same, by whomsoever it was delivered; namely, "that God has given to us eternal life; and that this life is in his Son: he that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life^r." By whomsoever it was delivered also, it was equally "the testimony of Christ^s," both as having him for its Author, and him for its end.

Hence the appropriate name of Christ, as designating the first great object of his Mission, is, "The faithful and true Witness^t."

2. To be "a Leader and Commander to the people"—

[Moses, in his day, was a witness from God, to make known to the Jewish people the Divine will: but Joshua was the commander, who was to lead them into the Promised Land, and to give them a full possession of their inheritance. The two offices are combined in Christ; who, whilst he is given for a Witness, is also given for "a Leader and Commander to the people." He even appeared to Joshua of old, "as Captain

¹ John i. 18.

^m John v. 20.

ⁿ Rom. xv. 8.

^o John iii. 31, 32.

^p Acts xx. 24.

^q 1 John iv. 14.

^r 1 John v. 11, 12.

^s 1 Cor. i. 6.

^t Rev. i. 5, and iii. 14.

of the host of the Lord," from whom alone all Joshua's success should spring^u. And to us also is he revealed under the same blessed character, "The Captain of our salvation^x." He is at the head of all his people, and goes forth with them to battle: and all who have enlisted under his banners are to fight as good soldiers of Jesus Christ," and to "quit themselves like men^y;" nor are they ever to cease from their conflicts till they have gained the victory^z. Indeed "through him they shall be more than conquerors^a:" for he will never leave them, till he has fulfilled to them all that he has undertaken, and put them into possession of their promised inheritance^b.]

From the ends for which he is given, we proceed to shew,

II. The manner in which he is to be received—

This must correspond with God's design in sending him into the world. He must be received,

1. With a faith that wavers not—

[As he is a Witness to us, we must listen to his testimony with childlike simplicity. If he declare to us the plan of salvation, we must submit to it with the deepest reverence, and not for a moment dispute against it, or attempt to substitute in its place any plan of our own. If he open to us the great and precious promises which God has made in his word, we must rely upon them, and expect their accomplishment with the most assured confidence. If, on the other hand, he denounce the judgments of God against impenitent transgressors, we must tremble at his word, and humble ourselves before him in dust and ashes. As for all that men may say in opposition to his testimony, it must be to us of no greater weight than the dust upon the balance. Our answer must be, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them^c." To sit at his feet, like Mary, must be the delight of our souls. We must treasure up in our hearts his every word, even as his own Mother did, whilst he was yet a child^d. We must "meditate on his sayings day and night^e." They must be "more to us than our necessary food^f," and "sweeter to us than honey and the honey-comb." If under any circumstances our faith in his word begin to waver, we must be ashamed of ourselves, and mourn for it, as treating him with the greatest dishonour.

^u Josh. v. 14, 15. ^x Heb. ii. 10.

^y 2 Tim. ii. 3. 1 Cor. xvi. 13.

^z Rom. viii. 37.

^b Josh. xxiii. 14.

^a 1 Tim. vi. 12.

^c Isai. viii. 20.

^d Luke ii. 51.

^e Ps. 1, 2.

^f Job xxiii. 12.

Such conduct would be deemed a heinous offence even to a creature like ourselves: how much more offensive then must it be to *him*! it is nothing less than "making God a liar." This is the interpretation which God himself puts upon such conduct^g. Let us dread lest we be found guilty of this sin; and let us "be strong in faith, giving glory to God."]

2. With an obedience that has no reserves—

[The obedience which a soldier owes to his Commander is unbounded. The Commander has only to say, "Come," and he cometh; "Go," and he goeth; "Do this," and he doeth it. He does not think it any excuse for disobedience, that by following the command he shall have to encounter an enemy that will seek his life. On the contrary, the more dangerous the post is that is assigned him, the more he considers himself bound to execute the command with promptitude and zeal: and, if he hesitate through fear, he is deemed unworthy any more to serve his prince: yea, he may account himself happy, if his life be not also forfeited as the penalty of his transgression. Shall there then be any limit to the obedience which we shall render to our heavenly Leader? Shall his commands be disobeyed through fear, or be executed with a timid trembling mind? Shall not his authority awe us, and his example shame us, into a conduct more worthy of our profession? Shall we not account it rather an honour to suffer for him, and be ready at any time, or in any manner, to lay down our lives for his sake? Yes; we must fight the good fight of faith. We must put on the whole armour provided for us, and go forth "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." We must be studious to learn from day to day, what is his will concerning us; and, once apprised of it, we must set ourselves instantly to obey it. Does it call for self-denial? We should for his sake "mortify the flesh with the affections and lusts." Does it summon us to action? "Whatever our hand findeth to do, we must do it with our might." We must be ever ready to "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach." There is nothing to which he calls us, which He has not himself both done and suffered; *he*, without any obligation on his part, except what his own love had imposed upon him: whereas *we* are bound by our allegiance to the God of heaven, and by all our hopes of acceptance with him in a better world, to "war a good warfare:" for it is only by being "faithful unto death that we can ever obtain the crown of life^h."

It is said in the words following my text, that the Gentiles to whom this Saviour was given, "should run unto him, and

^g John v. 9, 10.

^h Rev. ii. 10.

glorify his name." I call on you therefore to verify this prediction, and "not to receive the grace of God in vain." It is in this way only that you can shew to the Jews what blessings you enjoy, and stir them up to seek a participation of them. And in this way alone can you "walk worthy of your high calling," or "render to the Lord according to the benefits he has conferred upon you."]

DCCCLXXXIII.

OF SEEKING THE LORD IN TIME.

Isai. lv. 6. *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near^a.*

THERE is scarcely any more striking proof of our insensibility with respect to eternal things, than the unconcern we shew whilst death is casting his darts all around us. If our neighbour's house were on fire, we should think of exerting ourselves to secure our own habitation from the flames, or to save our property: yet we can hear of the deaths of others, and confess that we ourselves also are dying creatures, and yet delay our preparation for death as much as if we were exempt from the common danger. But every fresh instance of mortality is a voice from God to the survivors; and speaks to them the very language of the text.

We need not give a formal distribution of the text, as it is our intention only to ground upon it a general exhortation to seek the Lord. Yet, that our plan may not be altogether concealed, we shall arrange our thoughts under the following observations.

- I. There is reason to fear that God, though essentially present with all, is spiritually and practically absent from the most of us—

[It is not improbable that some amongst us may live in the occasional, if not also the habitual, commission of known and open sin. In some will be found drunkenness and lewdness; in others, falsehood and dishonesty: in some, pride and envy; in others, malice and revenge. And are not these

^a There is a beautiful plan of a Sermon on this text in Claude's Essay, page 54 of *fifth* and *improved* Edition.

manifest tokens that they are strangers to the Divine presence? Can it be said of such persons that God is with them of a truth?

But where the external deportment is blameless, and where the outward form of godliness is maintained, how little is there, for the most part, of its power! Many read the Bible, and find it only a sealed book: they attend the ordinances of religion, but experience no delight in them: they pray in secret (if mere formal devotions can be called prayer) and derive no benefit to their souls. Whence is all this, but because God is absent from them? If God were with them, his "words would be spirit and life" unto them^b; their communion with him would be sweet; their communications from him would diffuse a glory round their very countenance^c; and the exercises of religion, though not always alike spiritual, would on the whole be accompanied with vital energy, and be followed with progressive sanctification.

Such, alas! is the state of the generality: however they may have witnessed the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, and have felt some alarm and terror in their souls, they are yet strangers to that "still small voice" in which the Lord reveals himself to his people^d. We may say, in reference to what was spoken on a very different occasion, Lord, if thou hadst been with them, they had not been thus habitually dead and formal^e.]

II. We cannot hope to find him, if we do not seek him—

[We know that, in the ordinary course of providence, neither the countryman can fill his barns without much previous toil, nor the student acquire knowledge without much patient investigation. How then can it be supposed that we should attain the knowledge and enjoyment of God, without seeking after him in his appointed way? He has indeed sometimes been found of them that sought him not, and made known to them that inquired not after him^f: but this must no more be expected by us, than that the sea should open a passage for our feet, or the sun stand still to lengthen out our day. God has said he will be inquired of by us^g, and that we must ask, if we would have; and seek, if we would find^h. Nor is it in a cold indifferent manner that we must seek; we must *strive* as persons in earnestⁱ, and if once we get access to God, we must detain him, as it were, by force^k, and take his kingdom, as it were, by violence^l. And it is for want of this holy zeal in

^b John vi. 63.

^c Exod. xxxiv. 35.

^d 1 Kings xix. 11—13.

^e John xi. 21, 32.

^f Rom. x. 20.

^g Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^h Luke xi. 9.

ⁱ Luke xiii. 24.

^k Gen. xxxii. 26.

^l Matt. xi. 12.

our endeavours, that so many of us seek him throughout our lives, and never obtain a saving "acquaintance with him." We must also seek him *in and through Christ*: for it is by Christ only that we can ever come unto the Father^m.]

III. There is a time coming, when, though we should seek him, he will not be found of us—

[This awful truth is strongly intimated in the text; nor ought it to be concealed from our view. We all know that, at the time of death, our opportunities of seeking God will be for ever closedⁿ. However earnestly we may implore the Divine favour^o, or even the smallest expression of it^p, we shall ask in vain. But our day of grace may also be terminated on this side the grave. The Jews in the wilderness^q, and those who rejected our Lord's word^r, and the greatest part of the Jewish nation at the time of his death^s, were given over to final impenitence, even while they continued in the full enjoyment of health, and of all outward privileges. And we have reason to fear the same dreadful judgments, if we persist in slighting God's warnings, and in deferring our repentance^t. How earnestly should we improve the present hour, if we duly considered this!]

IV. If we would seek him now, he would be found of all of us—

[This is the accepted time; this is the day of salvation^u. God "is near" to us at present, both in his word and ordinances, and he is willing to be found of every sincere worshipper. If indeed we have determinately set ourselves against him, and resisted all the motions of his Spirit, till he has ceased to strive with us, it is possible that we may be already given up to final obduracy^x. But if we feel any desire after God, then we may be sure that he has not yet cast us off: that very desire is, if we may so speak, a knock at the door of our hearts, whereby God intimates his willingness to take up his abode with us^y. Only let us cherish the latent spark; and we may be assured that he will not quench the smoking flax^z; he will not despise the day of small things^a.]

We will not conclude this address without a more particular APPLICATION of it to different persons.

^m John xiv. 6.

ⁿ Eccl. ix. 10.

^o John ix. 4. Matt. xxv. 11, 12. and vii. 22, 23.

^p Luke xvi. 24, 26. ^q Ps. lxxxix. 11, 12. and xcv. 11.

^r John viii. 21.

^s Luke xix. 42.

^t Prov. i. 24—31.

^u 2 Cor. vi. 2.

^x Gen. vi. 3.

^y Rev. iii. 20.

^z Matt. xii. 20.

^a Zech. iv. 10.

1. To the young—

[To you God has given an express promise that you shall not seek his face in vain^b. Seek then to resemble those whose names are recorded for your encouragement, as having obtained mercy in their earliest years^c, and as being highly distinguished among the saints of God. And let not these years, which are so favourable for the reception of divine impressions^d, be wasted in the service of sin and Satan.]

2. To the afflicted—

[Affliction is oftentimes the voice of God^e: and, if you have the wisdom to improve it, you also have a special promise, that you shall find favour with God^f. Begin then “in the day of adversity to consider;” and you shall have no reason to regret the severity of the means, when once you have attained the end which God designs to accomplish by them.]

3. To the old—

[You above all should set yourselves to seek the Lord, because your day of grace cannot be continued much longer. It is a comfort, however, to reflect, that you may obtain mercy even at the eleventh hour^g. Let then your past time be redeemed with diligence; and, the shorter the space allowed you is for seeking the Lord, the more earnest let your exertions be to “know the things belonging to your peace, before they be for ever hid from your eyes.”]^h

^b Prov. viii. 17.

^c Samuel, Josiah, and Timothy, from their very childhood, and John Baptist from the womb.

^d Prov. xxii. 6.

^e Mic. vi. 9.

^f Ps. l. 15.

^g Matt. xx. 5, 6.

^h If this were the subject of a *Funeral Sermon*, the friends of the deceased might be addressed, and the deceased person's past and *present* views of this subject be impressed upon their minds as incentives to diligence.”

DCCCCLXXXIV.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO TURN TO GOD.

Isai. lv. 7. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

WE may discern many of the attributes of the Deity, as wisdom, power, and goodness, in the works

of creation : but it is from the book of revelation only that we obtain the knowledge of his mercy. The Heathen indeed entertain some faint ideas that God will pardon them ; though they know not how to approach him with acceptance, nor have any assurance that they shall find acceptance with him. But we are invited by God himself to come unto him, and are encouraged by an express promise that he will pardon even the vilest of returning prodigals.

In the words before us, we may see,

I. Our duty—

All of us by nature are in a state of departure from God, and of subjection to sin. Hence our duty is,

1. To forsake our sins—

[Every one has some “*way*” which he has marked out for himself ; some way that is suited to his age, his education, his circumstances in life, or his constitutional propensities. Some are addicted to open vice ; others to a more decent species of gaiety ; others to the pursuit of riches ; others to the more refined, though not less destructive, gratifications of literary pride ; while others again regard nothing but their ease, and the indulgence of their peculiar habits. But whatever be our ways, if they be not such as are prescribed in the Scripture, and such as lead directly to heaven, they must be “*forsaken*.” We may indeed, and must, attend to our earthly duties ; but in them, as well as in our religious exercises, we must seek the glory of God, and the salvation of our souls.

We must moreover forsake our “*thoughts*.” Even they who are most correct in their conduct, will find abundant matter for humiliation in their “*thoughts*.” What proud thoughts arise even from their supposed superiority to others ! What vain, angry, envious, worldly, covetous, impure, and unbelieving thoughts lodge within us all, and find a welcome reception in our hearts ! These then, no less than our ways, must be “*forsaken* :” we must watch and pray against them, and labour to have our minds occupied with holy and heavenly contemplations.]

2. To turn unto our God—

[As it is from God that we have departed, so it is unto God that we must return : nor will any reformation of our lives, or even renovation of our hearts, avail us, if this further change be not accomplished within us.

We must turn to him *in humility*. All of us, without exception, are guilty before God. Let us, even the best amongst us, only mark what our thoughts most easily recur to, and what they fix upon with the greatest frequency and delight, in those seasons when there is nothing particular to engage them, and we shall find no great cause for self-preference and self-complacency. Such a view of ourselves would shew us what we are before Him “who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins;” and would convince us that we need to abase ourselves before him with self-loathing and self-abhorrence.

We must also turn to him *in faith*. There is but one Mediator between God and man, whose merits and intercession must be the only grounds of our hope. In him, even in the Lord Jesus Christ, we must trust: we must make mention of his name and of his righteousness, even his only: and we must believe that God, for his sake, is willing to accept the very chief of sinners.

We must yet further turn to him *in an unreserved devotedness both of heart and life*. Mark, how entirely the heart of an unregenerate man gives itself to the world! Not that he never engages in religious duties; but, whatever he does, his affections are set upon things below, and not on things above. The very reverse of this is our duty: we are not to be so occupied with heavenly pursuits, as to neglect the duties of our place and station; but, in the midst of all our earthly occupations, God must have our hearts: his command must be the reason, his word the rule, and his honour the end, of all our actions. To fulfil his will, and enjoy his presence, should be the one object of our lives.]

Nor shall we decline this duty, if we consider what the text proposes for,

II. Our encouragement—

God will “shew mercy” to returning penitents—

[If it were doubtful whether our efforts would prove effectual for our salvation, we should not readily undertake the work of mortifying sin, and of turning unto God. But there is no doubt: for God delighteth in the exercise of mercy: “judgment is his strange work,” to which he is utterly averse: “he willeth not the death of any sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live.” He invites us and expostulates with us in the most tender manner, “Turn ye: turn ye! why will ye die?” “Wilt thou not be made clean? O, when shall it once be?” — — — Let but the assurances of mercy which the Scripture affords to penitent sinners be considered, and no one will want a motive for abandoning his sins, and for returning to his God.]

He will “abundantly pardon” transgressions, however multiplied they may have been—

[They whose iniquities have been heinous and long-continued, are apt to despond, and to imagine themselves beyond the reach of mercy. But none need to despair: God’s mercy is infinite: though our sins may have been numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore, his mercies will far exceed them: “as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.” See what sinners have been forgiven! mark the transgressions of David, Manasseh, Peter, and others; see the peculiar aggravations of their guilt! and then say whether God will not multiply his pardons to the very utmost extent of our necessities? — — — After such a view of God’s mercy, our hearts must be harder than adamant, if we refuse to repent, and to turn unto him.]

ADDRESS—To those who,

1. Presume upon God’s mercy—

[You are at ease, because God is merciful: but are his mercies ever promised to those who live and die in sin? Are not rather his judgments denounced against them? Search the Scriptures, and see if you can find one word to comfort those who persist in wilful impenitence: alas! you will soon find to your cost, that, as God is merciful to repenting sinners, so will he fulfil the declaration, that “except ye repent, ye shall all perish.”]

2. Limit it—

[Satan’s first device for the retaining of sinners under his dominion is, to represent God to them as a Being who is too merciful to punish them. His next endeavour is, to make them believe that their sins are too great to be forgiven, and that there is not mercy enough in the heart of God to pardon such transgressors as they. But, if any of us are tempted to entertain such thoughts of the Deity, let us only reflect upon the words of the text, and the many passages of Scripture which illustrate and confirm them, and we shall see at once the folly and impiety of limiting his mercies. Let such persons at least put the matter to a trial; and they shall find, by sweet experience, that “whosoever cometh unto him, he will in no wise cast out.”]

3. Abuse it—

[Are there those in the world, who, because they have obtained mercy (as they think), are remiss in “working out their salvation?” Are there those who imagine, that, because they have “once overcome the world, they may be again

entangled therein, and overcome" by it, without any danger to their souls? Let them know, that they are fatally deluded; and that, if they do not awake from their stupor, "their last end will be worse than their beginning." If the mercy of God do not stimulate us to an unfeigned renunciation of all sin, and an unremitting activity in his service, we shall in vain hope that it shall be exercised towards us in the day of judgment.]

4. Enjoy it—

[What reason have you to admire and adore the goodness of your God! O, let a lively sense of it be ever on your minds. Be meditating daily how you shall most acceptably express your gratitude towards him. Labour to glorify him to the uttermost. Commend him to your fellow-sinners. Let your "ways" be such as shall be well-pleasing in his sight. Let your "thoughts" be devoutly occupied in praises and thanksgivings to him. And let your fellowship with him become daily more sweet, more intimate, and more abiding. Thus shall his mercy, which has already abounded towards you, be displayed in yet richer communications to all eternity.]

DCCCCLXXXV.

GOD'S WAYS ABOVE OURS.

Isai. lv. 8, 9. *My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord: for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

MEN are apt to judge of God by themselves, and to suppose him restricted by such laws as they deem proper for their own observance. The wicked almost reduce him to a level with themselves in a moral view^a: and even the godly form very inadequate conceptions of his ways and works. Of this God himself apprises us in the words before us; which we shall elucidate by shewing how different his thoughts and ways are from what we should have expected with respect to,

I. The objects of his choice—

[If we thought to take a person into the nearest relation to ourselves, we should be inclined to prefer one of high rank: if we undertook to instruct a person, we should select one who

^a Ps. l. 21.

was intelligent and docile: or if we purposed to confer any favour, we should look out for an object that was worthy of it. But God acts in a very different manner. He takes the poor in preference to the rich^b — — — the ignorant before the wise^c — — — and, in many instances, the vile before those, whose lives have been more moral^d — — — Not that God disregards morality, where it flows from proper principles, and has respect to his glory: but his grace is his own^e; and he will impart it to whomsoever he will^f, without accounting himself responsible to any for the distribution of his favours^g.

This exactly accords with the experience of the primitive saints^h, and with the Church of God in every age and place — — —]

II. The extent of his love—

[If it were told us that God would shew mercy to our fallen race, what should we have been led to expect at his hands? We should scarcely have raised our thoughts higher than an exemption from punishment. Indeed, *this* is the limit which unenlightened men universally assign to God's mercy; "He is merciful, therefore he will not punish." But who would have ever thought, that he should *so* love us, as to give his only dear Son to die for us? — — — Who would have conceived, that he should moreover send his Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts as our instructor, sanctifier, and comforter? — — — Who would have imagined that he should give *himself* to us, with all that he is, and all that he has, as our present and everlasting portion? — — — Is not all this "as much above our thoughts as the heavens are above the earth?"]

III. The methods by which he accomplishes towards us the purposes of his grace—

[Supposing us informed that God would take us to heaven, we should be ready to think, that certainly he would deliver us at once from temporal affliction, and more especially from spiritual conflicts. Would it ever enter our minds, that the objects of his eternal love should be left to endure the pressures of want, or the agonies of a cruel death? Could we once imagine, that they should be exposed, year after year, to the assaults of Satan: and be suffered, on many occasions, to

^b Matt. xi. 5. James ii. 5. John vii. 48.

^c Matt. xi. 25, 26. 1 Cor. i. 19, 20.

^d Matt. xxi. 31, 32. and xix. 20—22. contrasted with Luke vii. 37, 47. and 1 Tim. i. 13.

^e Matt. xx. 15.

^f Rom. ix. 15, 16.

^g Job xxxiii. 13. Rom. ix. 20.

^h See 2 Sam. vii. 18, 19. 1 Cor. i. 26—29.

wound their consciences, to defile their souls, and to grieve his good Spirit, by the commission of sin? Yet these are the ways in which he deals with them, and it is by these means that he “fulfils in them the good pleasure of his goodnessⁱ.” Nor is this a mere arbitrary appointment: for, by these means, he discovers to us far more abundantly the riches of his grace, and affords us more ample grounds for praise and thanksgiving^k. The way is circuitous indeed; but it is the right way to the promised land^l.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. How should we magnify and adore our God for the blessings of his grace!

[Well may every child of God exclaim with wonder, What manner of love is this wherewith thou hast loved me, that thou shouldest give thine only dear Son to redeem me by his blood, and thine eternal Spirit to sanctify me by his grace? In the review of his own life he may well add, ‘Why *me*, Lord? why hast thou chosen *me*, and borne with *me*, and plucked *me* as a brand out of the burning? Why too hast thou used such methods for my recovery and salvation?’ Yes verily, in the review of all these mercies, he must of necessity exclaim, “Bless the Lord, O my soul; and let all that is within me bless his holy name.”]

2. How submissive should we be under the darkest dispensations of his Providence!

[While we are saying, with Jacob, “All these things are against me,” perhaps the very dispensations, of which we so complain, are absolutely necessary to our eternal welfare^m. Let this thought silence every murmur, and encourage us to

ⁱ God does not *approve* of sin, or *tempt* to sin: but he *makes use* of the sins which men commit, to humble them in the dust, and to magnify his own superabounding mercy. Rom. v. 20, 21. Thus he *permitted* the fall of Peter, and overruled it for good, Luke xxii. 31, 32.; but that *permission* neither excused, nor extenuated Peter’s guilt. The sin was the same, whether it were pardoned or punished: but the grace of Christ was eminently displayed in the pardon of it; and backsliders have ever since derived much encouragement from thence (*not to deny their Lord*, but) to repent, and turn to God.

^k The deliverance vouchsafed to the Israelites was not a little enhanced by their oppression in Egypt, and their subsequent embarrassments.

^l Ps. cvii. 7.

^m Perhaps something which has met us unexpectedly has been, like Abigail, God’s messenger to keep us from some deadly sin. 1 Sam. xxv. 17—33.

say, even in the most afflictive circumstances, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in himⁿ."]]

3. How should we acknowledge God even in the most trivial occurrences!

[There is no occurrence really trivial, or unimportant: for there is such a concatenation of causes and effects fixed in the Divine purpose, that the most important events depend on circumstances, which seem to us altogether trifling and contingent°. Let the life of Joseph be surveyed, and we shall find that a thousand different things, apparently casual and independent, concurred to accomplish God's promises towards him. Thus it is with respect to us; and it is our privilege to "acknowledge God in all our ways," and to commit ourselves wholly to his guidance.]

4. What a glorious place will heaven be!

[There the whole of the Divine dispensations towards us will be opened to our view. There God's "ways, which were in the great deep, and his footsteps, which were not known," nor perhaps capable of being comprehended by us in this world, will be clearly seen. O! what wonders of love and mercy shall we then behold! With what rapture shall we then exclaim, O the depths^p! Let us then wait a few days; and the most painful events of this life shall be a source of everlasting joy.]

ⁿ Job xiii. 15.

^o Luke xix. 3, 4, 9.

^p Rom. xi. 33.

DCCCCLXXXVI.

RESEMBLANCE OF THE GOSPEL TO RAIN AND SNOW.

Isai. lv. 10, 11. *As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

THE more just our views of God's perfections are, the more firm and enlarged will be our expectations from him. We are apt to distrust his mercy and love, because we "judge him to be such an one as ourselves:" whereas, if we considered how infinitely remote his ways and thoughts are from ours, we should repose the most unlimited confidence in him,

and have every fear swallowed up in the contemplation of his power and grace. These considerations are proposed by God himself as an encouragement to us to return from our evil ways; and, in the words before us, we are assured, that the blessings which he will convey to us through the medium of his word, shall be as free, as certain, as abundant, as those which he imparts to the earth by means of the rain and snow. In illustrating this comparison, we shall trace the resemblance between the word, and the rain or snow,

I. In their origin—

“The rain and snow come down from heaven”—

[If the whole world should unite their efforts to produce rain, they would never accomplish their end. It is God who forms the clouds, and causes them to water the earth: and therefore to him we must acknowledge ourselves indebted for every shower that falls. Of this we are frequently reminded in the Scriptures^a: and the gods of the Heathen are challenged, if they can, to exert a similar power, and thus establish their right to the honours ascribed to them^b.]

The word of the Gospel also “cometh forth out of God’s mouth”—

[It proceeded from God *originally*: the words of “prophecy came not of men; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost^c.” yea, “*all Scripture*,” and not the prophetic parts only, “was given by inspiration of God^d.” Moreover the Gospel, when faithfully preached, is also *at this time* from God. It is God who instructs his servants, and qualifies them to declare his truth: and the word delivered by them is, “not the word of man, but in truth the word of God.” We mean not to insinuate, that any persons now have *the same kind* of inspiration which was vouchsafed to the Apostles: but every faithful minister is taught and directed of God what to say, and is assisted in the delivery of his message^e. As an ambassador of God, he speaks altogether in God’s name, and may address every one of his audience in

^a Ps. cxlvii. 8. Job xxxviii. 25—28.

^b Jer. xiv. 22.

^c 2 Pet. i. 21.

^d 2 Tim. iii. 16.

^e Matt. xxviii. 20. And though we cannot *strictly* apply to ourselves such passages as Mark xiii. 11. and Luke xxi. 14, 15. yet they teach us what assistance to expect from Christ, provided we apply to him *in the diligent use of means*.

the words of Ehud to Eglon, "I have a message from God to thee^f."

But the resemblance between the word and the rain is yet more strongly marked,

II. In their operation—

The "rain and snow" are the means of rendering the earth fruitful—

[If the earth be only a few months without rain, the most calamitous consequences ensue^g: but if the parched and thirsty earth be visited with rain or snow, its vegetative powers are revived, and it yields an abundance of food for man and beast^h; yea, there is a sufficiency not only for the present consumption, but for "sowing," in order to a future crop.]

The word of God also is instrumental to the fructifying of the souls of men—

[God has many gracious ends to "accomplish" by his word: sometimes he sends it *to quicken* the dead; and then even "the bones that are dry, very dry," are made to liveⁱ. Sometimes he sends it *to comfort* the afflicted; and then it proves as balm to the wounded spirit, nor can the most distressed mind withstand its energy^k. Sometimes he sends it *to sanctify* the polluted; and then the most inveterate lusts give way, and his people are transformed into his image^l. Finally, by its various operations he determines *to save* the lost; and behold, it stops not short of his purpose: it "prosperes in the thing whereto he has sent it," and becomes "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth^m."

An easterly wind may counteract the benefits which would accrue from the rain; but not all the powers of hell shall be able to defeat the purposes of God, in sending his word: "it never returns unto him void:" weak as it seems to be when delivered by sinful man, it yet is "sharper than any two-edged swordⁿ;" it "casts down every thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ, and brings into obedience to him" the heart that would resist its power^o.]

Let us LEARN then from this beautiful comparison,

^f Judg. iii. 20.

^g See Jer. xiv. 2—6.

^h Ps. lxxv. 9—13.

ⁱ Ezek. xxxvii. 1—10. Ps. cxix. 50. Jam. i. 18.

^k Ps. cxvii. 8—20. Deut. xxxii. 2.

^l John xv. 3. and xvii. 17. Eph. v. 26.

^m Rom. i. 16. 1 Cor. i. 21.

ⁿ Heb. iv. 12.

^o 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

1. The importance of attending the preached word—

[We know not when it is that God intends to send his word home to our hearts; and therefore we should always be found waiting upon him in the way of his appointment. The man who was healed at the pool of Bethesda had been there many years; and if he had absented himself on the day that Jesus visited the place, he had lost the blessing that was designed for him^p. However long therefore we may have attended at the house of God, apparently in vain, it becomes us still to tarry the Lord's leisure, and to expect the showers of his grace in due season.]

2. The danger of despising it—

[The text, though often interpreted as comprehending God's *judicial* purposes, does not properly relate to them; for, as the rain is not spoken of as deluging the earth, but only as rendering it fruitful, so the parallel between the Gospel and the rain should be drawn only as relating to mercies, and not to judgments. Nevertheless we may notice in this place, that, as God sent his miracles to harden Pharaoh's heart, so he may, and often does, send his word to blind, and harden the hearts of proud opposers. This was the end of the commission given to Isaiah^q; and, though it was not the *primary* intent of Christ when he preached to the people in parables, it constituted a *part* of his design in relation to the proud, cavilling, and incorrigible Pharisees^r; and the same end is accomplished, though not *primarily* intended, in respect to thousands of infidels in every age^s. Beware then, lest God "take you in your own craftiness:" for whether you receive his word or not, "it shall not go forth in vain:" if it be not "a savour of life unto life, it will prove a savour of death unto death^t."]]

3. The benefit of praying over it—

[It is not in the power of man to command a blessing on the word. "Paul may preach in vain, and Apollos water in vain, unless God give the increase^u." But if we pray to God, he will send us such a word as shall be suited to us; such a word as shall make us ready to think that the minister has received private information respecting us; such a word as shall discover to us our whole hearts^x, and constrain us to fall down on our faces, and confess that God is indeed present in his ordinances^y. The minister may draw the bow at a venture; but God will direct the arrow between the joints of the

^p John v. 1—9.

^q Isai. vi. 9, 10.

^r Luke viii. 10.

^s Rom. xi. 8. Acts xxviii. 26, 27.

^t 2 Cor. ii. 16.

^u 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.

^x John iv. 29.

^y 1 Cor. xiv. 25.

harness, and cause it to pierce our inmost souls^z. Let us then pray that God would direct and assist the minister, and render his word effectual to our good. Thus shall we secure to ourselves a blessing, and, like the refreshed earth, bring forth fruit suited to the culture bestowed upon us^a.]

^z 2 Kings xxii. 34.

^a Heb. vi. 7.

DCCCCLXXXVII.

THE CHANGE WROUGHT BY THE GOSPEL.

Isai. lv. 12, 13. *For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.*

THE change wrought annually on the face of nature from desolation and barrenness to beauty and fruitfulness, is a lively representation of the change effected by the Gospel of Christ. "The rain and the snow descending on the earth" nourish the whole vegetable creation, and cause every part of it to spring forth in its appointed season: and, in the same manner, "the word of God, dropping as the rain, and distilling as the dew" upon the souls of men, infuses life into them, and renders them fruitful in every good word and work. This is the parallel drawn by the prophet himself, who, expatiating on the subject, predicts, under the image of the Jews' return from Babylon, the progress of the Gospel in renovating the intellectual and spiritual world. His words will lead us to consider,

I. The effects of the preached Gospel—

The civilizing of the world is a very small part of the work which the Gospel is intended to accomplish. It is sent,

1. To inspire new feelings—

[Man in his natural state is an entire stranger to spiritual joy, or solid peace. The peace that flows from a want of foresight or reflection, and the joy that consists in mere animal

gratifications, he may possess: but he is as destitute of spiritual enjoyments, as the brute creation are of intellectual pleasure. His state however is wonderfully changed when he receives the word of God in truth. At first indeed he feels trouble and anguish; but as soon as ever he has obtained a sense of his acceptance with God, his tears are wiped away, and "the bones which were broken rejoice." It frequently happens, especially where the preceding sorrows have been deep, that the joy which succeeds them is rapturous and abundant. The surprise of Peter, on the eve of his expected execution, was not unlike that of a new convert: suddenly, a light shone in upon him, and his chains fell off, and the prison doors flew open, and an angel conducted him out, so that he could not persuade himself that he was awake, but thought he saw a vision: thus when the new convert is first brought forth into light and liberty, and finds the obstacles, which had seemed insurmountable, removed, he is ready to think it must be all a delusion: it is with him as with those of old, "when the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream: then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing;" yea, "the very hills break forth before him into singing, and all the trees of the field clap their hands." We must not however suppose, that all are equally elated; or that the joy which any feel will continue with them: it will rather subside into a peaceful tranquillity of mind: they may *go out with joy*; but they will be *led forth with peace*. The Saviour's joy, which is to be fulfilled in us, consisted rather in peace than exultation; and such is the legacy that he has left to us^a. At first we are like a stream rippling and murmuring near the fountain head; but in our more advanced state we resemble rather the deepened river flowing with silent majesty.]

2. To infuse new dispositions—

[A thorny bush is unproductive and worthless; as a brier is unseemly and injurious. The one is a just image of the more decent of mankind; the other, of the more profane. All are low and grovelling in their nature, having no desires beyond this present world; and too many, by their influence as well as by their example, would impede the progress of those who are walking in the good way. The fir-tree on the other hand lifts its head on high; while the myrtle diffuses its fragrance all around; and both of them retain their verdure all the year: yet such shall the vilest of mankind become, when once they embrace the Gospel of Christ. They shall soar to heaven with devout affections; they shall spread around them

^a John xvii. 13. and xiv. 27.

a sweet savour of the knowledge of Christ; they shall be unfading ornaments in the place where they grow; and instead of wounding, like the brier, all that come in contact with them, they shall, like the myrtle, emit the sweeter fragrance the more they are bruised, and perfume, as it were, the very hand that bruises them.]

To impress our minds with a due esteem for the Gospel, let us proceed to consider,

II. The excellency of those effects—

There is an inherent excellence in holy dispositions, which, independent of the consequences flowing from them to ourselves or to society, must render them amiable in our eyes. But, as the text limits our views to the honour which accrues from them to God, we shall content ourselves with observing, that the change effected by the Gospel is to the Lord,

1. An occasion of praise—

[None who are quickened and renewed by the word ever take the honour to themselves: all with one voice cry, “He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God; therefore, not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise!” The greater the change that is wrought in any person’s heart, the less will he be disposed to arrogate any thing to himself on account of it: and most of all, “when the top-stone of the spiritual building shall be brought forth, will he shout, Grace, grace unto it!” From his first acquaintance with divine truth will he begin to speak of God with love and gratitude. His own experience will furnish him with an inexhaustible fund of praise and thanksgiving. Nor will his acknowledgments any longer be a dull recital of an established creed, but the lively effusions of a grateful heart.

Now if that be deemed excellent, which causes the name of any human being to be held in estimation, and to be transmitted to posterity with honour, how much more must that be excellent, which makes the name of God to be revered and adored!]

2. A monument of glory—

[It is not in this world only that God is glorified by the dispensations of his grace: at the day of judgment every saint will “be to him for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory.” “Christ will come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all that believe.” How *sovereign* will the *grace* of God appear to every one amongst them, when each sees himself as a brand plucked out of the fire! What *stupendous wisdom*

will be discovered in the plan, whereby he has effected their restoration to his favour! What *marvellous patience* will he appear to have exercised towards them under all their backslidings; and what *unbounded mercy* in pardoning their multiplied transgressions! Nor will his *power* be less an object of admiration, when it is seen how *wonderfully* it has been *exerted* in converting their souls, and in preserving them unto his heavenly kingdom. Yea, as long as there shall exist one glorified saint in heaven, so long shall the perfections of the Godhead be most eminently displayed in the salvation of sinful man.

How excellent then must that change be, which to all eternity shall be the brightest monument of the Divine perfections! The work of creation is excellent, though it is so soon to pass away: but that, glorious as it is, has no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth in the new creation.]

INFER—

1. What encouragement have men to hear the Gospel!

[As a person who had never seen the face of nature but in the depth of winter, would scarcely conceive it possible that so great an alteration could take place in it as is annually made within the space of a few weeks, so are many ready to imagine, that their hard and barren hearts are incapable of experiencing such a change as God requires. But his word is as powerful as ever: it is still “like fire, or like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces:” and though “it runs not, nor is glorified” to the same extent as in former days, yet wherever it is preached in sincerity and truth, there are some to attest its efficacy, and to prove, that “it is the power of God to the salvation of men.” Let none then despair: for though “the treasure be put into an earthen vessel, God will display the excellency of his power by means of it:” he will plant the fir-tree and the myrtle where nothing grew but thorns and briers; “he will make the wilderness like Eden, and the desert like the garden of the Lord.”]

2. What a sure criterion have we whereby to judge of our state!

[An insensibility with respect to spiritual things characterizes the natural man; and a *quickness of perception* with respect to them marks the person in whom the word of God has taken due effect. Have we then surrendered up our false peace, and our carnal joy? and have we attained to a scriptural “joy and peace in believing?” Have the creatures all around us been led, as it were, to sympathize with us, and congratu-

late us on the change? Look then next to *the tempers and dispositions* of the soul: have the low grovelling desires of the carnal mind been made to ascend to heaven; and the natural aversion to holy exercises been exchanged for an unfeigned delight in them? In short, is God now glorified in the whole of our deportment, so that, whosoever beholds our spirit and conduct is constrained to admire the grace of God in us? Doubtless, this change is not perfect in any; nor can we expect it to be so, while we carry about with us this body of sin and death: but is the change begun? and is it carrying on towards perfection? O that on considering these questions we might have the testimony of our consciences that things are so! But if there be no evidence of these things, let us beware, lest, instead of being eternal monuments of God's love, we be objects of his everlasting displeasure.]

DCCCCLXXXVIII.

ACCEPTANCE FOR ALL SINCERE WORSHIPPERS.

Isai. lvi. 4—7. *Thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.*

THE concluding words of our text sufficiently shew the scope of the whole passage. The chapter begins with proclaiming the approach of the Gospel dispensation, under which the way of obtaining righteousness and salvation through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ was to be fully revealed^a. In our text, the admission of all persons to the benefits of that dispensation is insisted on; and it is declared, that “in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, whatever may be his disqualifications according to the law, shall be accepted^b.”

^a ver. 1.

^b Compare Acts x. 34, 35.

Since God has a people scattered over the face of the whole earth, he will now have his Church open for the admission of every child of man.

In making known these gracious purposes, the prophet sets before us,

I. The character which God approves—

At no period did God ever approve of those who confined their obedience to the observance of any rites or ceremonies: at all times he has spoken the same language; “My Son, give me thy heart.” Accordingly in the description which is here given us of those who shall find acceptance with him, there are two marks whereby they are universally distinguished;

1. Their obedience to his will—

[Whatever conflicts they may have sustained in the earlier stage of their Christian experience, the first act which truly and properly designates them the Lord’s people is, their “joining of themselves to him” as his people. Till they have done this in sincerity and truth, they cannot be acknowledged as his. There may indeed be circumstances wherein a public devotion of themselves to him cannot be expected; but where the situation of the persons admits of it, there must be an union with the Lord’s people, and an open acknowledgment of Christ as their only Lord and Saviour — — —]

Nor must this be a mere empty profession: those who are upright before God will join themselves to him “to love and serve him” with their whole hearts. All other lords must be renounced; and God alone be honoured and obeyed.

Neither must this change be the result of fear alone: there must be a cordial consent of the will, and “a choosing of the things that please God.” There will, it is true, be still “a law in their members warring against the law in their minds:” but the deliberate purpose of their hearts must be to please God; God only, God universally, God always.

In one thing will they be particularly distinguished, that is, their reverence for the Sabbath, and their delight in sanctifying it to the Lord. *This* is twice mentioned in our text: and if we bear in mind, that the whole passage relates to the times of the Gospel, we shall see, that the sanctification of the Sabbath is a duty of perpetual obligation; and that, however some of the ceremonial observances relating to it under the Law are abrogated, the spiritual improvement of it will characterize the Lord’s people to the end of time. Indeed this is one of the

most prominent features in all who are truly upright before God: Whilst the world at large make the Sabbath a day of carnal ease or pleasure, and the generality of those who profess some regard for it sanctify only a part of it to the Lord, and *that* rather for conscience sake than because they have any pleasure in its duties, the upright devote to God and to the work of their souls the whole of it, and are as eager to improve that day for their spiritual advancement, as the ungodly are to improve the other six days for the advancement of their temporal welfare^c.]

2. Their affiance in his covenant—

[If we could suppose all these dispositions and actions to be united in a man who should disregard the Gospel covenant, they would never secure to the possessor the approbation of his God. The very best of men are sinners before God, and must seek for mercy in the way in which alone it will be vouchsafed. The way which God has appointed, is, through the covenant of grace; in which God has agreed to accept the atonement offered by his only dear Son, and to receive for his sake all who will plead the efficacy of that atonement. If any man think that his own virtues will suffice to recommend him to God, he will be left to suffer the penalty due to his iniquities, and will perish under the accumulated guilt of having despised the salvation offered him in the Gospel. In reading the Scriptures, we shall do well to notice how often “the keeping of God’s covenant and his commandments” are united together. Neither of these can by any means be dispensed with: they are both necessary for their respective ends; the one, to obtain mercy with our offended God; and the other, to manifest the sincerity of our faith and love. We must bear in mind therefore, that an humble affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ is quite as requisite for our acceptance with God, as any obedience to his commands can be; and that “the laying hold of God’s covenant” is essential to the character of all who would be approved by him.]

Such being the character portrayed in our text, we proceed to notice the terms in which God has described,

II. The approbation with which he will honour it—

Whatever disadvantages such a person may labour under, God will,

1. Accept him in all his services—

[Eunuchs and strangers were disqualified by the Law from entering into the congregation of Jehovah^d. But God

^c Isai. lviii. 13, 14.

^d Deut. xxiii. 1—8.

promises, under the Christian dispensation, to admit all without any exception, provided their dispositions and habits be such as he approves; yea, God himself will “bring them to his holy mountain^e,” by sending his shepherds to search them out, and to bring them upon their shoulders rejoicing.

Moreover, God will “make them joyful in his house of prayer.” This is a blessing experienced by none but those who are truly upright. In the house of *preaching* indeed, the vilest hypocrites may be delighted^f: and it would be well if the undue preference given to preaching, and the late attendance at public worship, observable among religious professors in the present day, did not give reason to fear, that their religion is in their ears only, and not in their hearts. Certain it is, that, amongst those who are truly upright, such conduct would be abhorred: they delight to draw nigh to God, and to pour out their hearts before him: and *this*, not only when some fluent person is exhibiting his gifts, but when the prayers of our Liturgy (better than which were never composed by mortal man) are offered up in the presence of the congregation. The man that has not his heart in tune for such prayers as those, has yet to learn what his wants are, and what should be the posture of his soul before God. To the penitent and contrite soul they will often be as marrow and fatness; and to join in them will be the sublimest pleasure he can enjoy.

Whilst they “draw nigh to God, God will also draw nigh to them,” and will “manifest his acceptance” of them by some special tokens of his love. In former times he often testified his acceptance of the sacrifices by sending fire from heaven, to consume them upon the altar: now he will do the same, as it were, in a more secret way: he will send his Spirit into the soul as a Spirit of adoption, he will “shed abroad his love there,” and will fill it with an abundance of grace and peace.]

2. He will number them amongst his most-favoured servants—

[To be childless was, under the Jewish dispensation, accounted a misfortune, and even a disgrace: and persons considered themselves as living in their posterity. Of this happiness the persons addressed in our text were deprived: but God assured them, that “he would give them a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters:” their children, even if they were as numerous as those of Ahab, might be cut off in a few hours, and their inheritance in Israel might be lost: but God would give to them a name and an inheritance that should endure for ever. To every one that answers to the foregoing character is this promise made: and to every one

^e Heb. xii. 22.

^f Ezek. xxxiii. 30—32.

shall it assuredly be fulfilled in its season^g. Even at this time have they the earnest of these blessings in their souls; and in due time they shall possess them in all their fulness^h.]

IMPROVEMENT—

In this view of our subject we have,

1. An antidote to despondency—

[Those who are upright in heart are still, as formerly, ready to entertain desponding fears, and to imagine that there is something in their situation and circumstances which renders their case peculiarly hopeless. But God delights to encourage such persons with the most consolatory declarationsⁱ. Let not any then say, “I am a dry tree,” or suppose that he is incapable of yielding fruit to God: for those who are “farthest off, may yet be brought nigh by the blood of Christ^k,” and “strangers and foreigners,” if they embrace and obey the covenant of grace, shall become “fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God^l.”]

2. A stimulus to exertion in the cause of Christ—

[The same principle of unbelief which discourages men in relation to themselves, operates powerfully to repress their exertions for others. The state of the heathen is thought to present insurmountable obstacles to their conversion. But the most ignorant savages are not farther from a participation of the Gospel, than eunuchs and strangers were from communion with the Jewish Church: yet *these* have already found access to God: why therefore may not *they*? Indeed we are assured by the prophet, that the remotest Gentiles *shall* be gathered to the Lord^m; and our Lord himself confirms the joyful truthⁿ. Let us then open wide the door of God’s house to the Gentile world: let us encourage them to “lay hold on his covenant:” and let us, each according to his ability, labour to hasten forward that glorious day, when all the nations of the earth shall be converted to the Lord, and “become one fold under one Shepherd^o.”]

^g Rev. iii. 12.

^h 1 John iii. 2.

ⁱ Isai. xl. 27, 28.

^k Eph. ii. 12, 13.

^l Eph. ii. 19.

^m Isai. lx. 3.

ⁿ ver. 8.

^o John x. 16.

DCCCCLXXXIX.

THE MAJESTY AND HOLINESS OF GOD.

Isai. lvii. 15.—*Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit,*

to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

THERE is nothing more vain than creature-confidence: it is sure to provoke the displeasure of God, and ultimately to disappoint ourselves. On the contrary, an humble affiance in the Lord will secure to us his effectual aid: it will avail for the weakest of the human race, and prove sufficient under the most arduous circumstances. The testimonies of Scripture to this effect are numerous and decisive^a. In the passage before us God reproves the Jews for forming alliances with heathens; and, having derided their vain hopes, and declared the security of those who should trust in him, issues a solemn proclamation for the direction and comfort of his Church in all ages; "Thus saith," &c.

In these words we behold,

I. The character of God—

The perfections by which God is pleased to characterize himself in this place were peculiarly calculated to expose the folly of those whom he was reproving, and to dispel the fears of those whom he designed to comfort. He mentions,

1. His majesty—

[In delineating the greatness of any created being, we are enabled to convey some just ideas by comparing one thing with another; but in speaking of the Deity there is no room for comparison: the universe is but as an atom, and the whole period of its existence but as a point, before him. He is not only high and lofty, but exclusively "the high and lofty ONE." He fills all space; he exists through an unsuccessive eternity. In attempting to declare him, we do but "darken counsel by words without knowledge." There are indeed in Scripture some representations given us, whereby we may attain such knowledge of him as our weak capacities are able to receive^b; but it is very little that we can conceive of him, though all the images in heaven and earth were exhibited in their brightest colours and in the most energetic language. The Scripture

^a Jer. xvii. 5—8.

^b Isai. xl. 12, 15, 17, 22. lxvi. 1. Ps. civ. 1—3. 1 Kings viii. 27. Jer. xxiii. 24.

itself tells us that “his greatness is unsearchable^c ;” nor can we sum up our knowledge of him better than in those expressive words of Moses, “From everlasting to everlasting thou art God^d.”]

2. His holiness—

[The “name” is that whereby any person is known, and, as applied to God, comprehends every thing whereby he is known to men. The perfections of his nature, the works of his hands, the dispensations of his providence, and the declarations of his grace, all are holy^e. And as he is holy in himself, so he cannot endure any thing which is defiled by sin; “he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity^f.” Indeed holiness is the very perfection that stamps a worth and excellence on all the other attributes of the Deity: without holiness his wisdom would be craft, his power tyranny, his mercy a weak, indiscriminate, or partial favour. Glorious as he is in every perfection, he is declared more especially to be so in holiness^g; and the angels in heaven make it the more immediate subject of their incessant praises^h. God himself is pleased to distinguish this perfection in a peculiar manner by making it the pledge of his fidelity in a most solemn oathⁱ; nor does he less surpass all created beings in holiness than he does in greatness and majesty: “There is none holy as the Lord,” says the Scripture^k; and again, “Thou ONLY art holy^l.”]

But, notwithstanding he is so great, that “the heaven of heavens cannot contain him,” and so holy, that “the very heavens are not pure in his sight,” yet will he “humble himself to behold the things in heaven,” and to “dwell with men on the earth.” This will appear by considering,

II. The objects of his love—

After the description which he has given of himself we shall not wonder that the great objects of his regard are,

1. The holy—

[Heaven is a region of holiness, in which not even the angels, after they had transgressed, were suffered to dwell. All that remain there are holy as God is holy. The saints too

^c Ps. cxlv. 3.

^d Ps. xc. 2.

^e Ps. clxv. 17. His hiding of his face occasionally, even from his dearest people, is no exception to this. See Ps. xxii. 1—3.

^f Hab. i. 13.

^g Exod. xv. 11.

^h Isai. vi. 3. Rev. iv. 8.

ⁱ Ps. lxxxix. 35.

^k 1 Sam. ii. 2.

^l Rev. xv. 4.

that are around the throne are all "equal to the angels themselves^m." Once indeed they were defiled by sin; but they were washed from their sin in the fountain of Christ's blood; and were renewed after the divine image by the Spirit of their God. Amongst these God "dwells in the high and holy place;" and though "their righteousness cannot profit him," yet he accepts the tribute of their praise, and scatters among them in rich profusion the tokens of his love. The cup of every one amongst them overflows with joy; and the "weight of glory," with which their heads are crowned, is commensurate with their ability to sustain it. Hence is heaven justly called, "The habitation of his holiness and his gloryⁿ."]]

2. The humble—

[As God loveth holiness where it is perfect, so he loves the desire after it where it is yet imperfect. "The humble" are they who have a just sense of their weakness and sinfulness; and "the contrite" are they who deeply bewail their state before God. Not that they mourn *merely* on account of the judgments they dread; but *principally* on account of their having so debased their own souls, and so "grieved the good Spirit of their God." Yea, if they be truly humble, they most of all lothe and abhor themselves, when they are most assured that God is pacified towards them^o. Such penitents, whatever they may have been in past time, are no less the objects of God's favour than the angels themselves; yea, if there were but one such person to be found on the face of the whole earth, God would fix his eyes on him with pleasure and complacency^p. He would listen to his groans with parental tenderness, and treasure up his tears in his vial, as the most valuable monuments of true contrition^q. He would bind up the wounds which sin had made, and pour the oil of joy and gladness into the disconsolate soul. Well he knows that nothing but his presence with the soul will fully satisfy its desires, or answer the purposes of his love: on this account he will lift up the light of his countenance upon it: as he formerly dwelt in the tabernacle by the *visible* symbols of his presence, so will he condescend to dwell *invisibly* in the contrite heart, making it his habitation, on purpose "that he may revive" and comfort it.]]

This subject will enable us to rectify some MISTAKES which very generally obtain in the Christian world:

1. That God is pleased with those who are pleased with themselves—

^m Luke xx. 36.

ⁿ Isai. lxiii. 15.

^o Ezek. xvi. 63.

^p Isai. lxvi. 2.

^q Ps. lvi. 8.

[It is common for moral and sober persons to think that God entertains as high an opinion of them as they do of themselves; and to despise the poor and contrite as weak enthusiasts. But what warrant have they for their presumptuous confidence? Can they find any declaration of God in *their* favour? Has he ever said that he would dwell with *them*? Even in heaven there are no self-admiring thoughts entertained either by men or angels^r; how much less then can there be any ground for such a disposition on earth! The Scripture tells us, it was not the proud Pharisee, but the self-condemning Publican that “went down to his house justified.” And to all eternity will it be found true, that “he who exalteth himself shall be abased, and that he alone who unfeignedly humbleth himself, shall ever be exalted.”]

2. That a consciousness of guilt is a ground for concluding that God is our enemy—

[Sin doubtless renders us obnoxious to the Divine displeasure: but it is sin unrepented of, and not merely sin committed, that shall condemn us. “The broken and contrite heart God will not despise^s,” and the more contrite we are, the more reason we have to hope that God is reconciled towards us. But there are some, who, contrasting their own meanness and sinfulness with the majesty and holiness of God, are ready to say, “There is no hope.” Let not such persons however be discouraged; for “though God be high, yet will he have respect unto the lowly^t,” yea, he not only *will* dwell with such persons, but actually *does* dwell with them: this is God’s own assertion in the text; and it is our duty, as well as our privilege, to believe him.]

3. That the exercise of serious and deep repentance will deprive a man of all the comforts of life—

[Repentance will doubtless deprive us of all pleasure in sin. But is there no other source of happiness than sin? May not all the gratifications of sense, and all the comforts of society, be enjoyed in a way of righteousness, as well as in the ways of sin? But even supposing we were deprived of these, would not the presence of God in our souls compensate for the loss of them? Is it nothing to have God “manifesting himself to us as he does not unto the world,” yea, “dwelling in us, and reviving us” with the consolations of his Spirit? or does a

^r The cherubim veil their faces and their feet while they serve God, Isai. vi. 2. And the glorified saints cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus, as unworthy of the honour conferred upon them, Rev. iv. 10, 11.

^s Ps. li. 17.

^t Ps. cxxxviii. 6.

man stand in need of a taper, while he enjoys the light of the meridian sun? Away then with all ungrounded jealousies on this head. Let us seek to *experience* the comforts of religion, instead of ignorantly asserting that there are none to be found. And, instead of reprobating the communications of grace and peace to the soul as enthusiastic and absurd, let us pray that we ourselves may be “the temples of the Holy Ghost,” “the habitation of God through the Spirit” for ever and ever.]

DCCCCXC.

GOD'S MERCY TO THE MOST OBSTINATE SINNERS.

Isai. lvii. 17, 18.—*For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him, and to his mourners.*

THE wickedness of man and the mercy of God mutually illustrate each other. There is no greater aggravation of sin than the circumstance of its being committed against a God of infinite goodness and compassion: nor is there any thing that magnifies the love of God more, than the unworthiness of the object towards whom that love is exercised. This observation is suggested to us by numberless passages of Scripture, in which a contrasted view of man's depravity and God's mercy is presented before our eyes: nor shall we ever find more ground for this observation, than in the words which we have just read. In this we may see,

I. The controversy which God has with sinners—

Iniquity, however secret the commission, or specious in its appearance, is hateful and abominable in the sight of God—

[There is no sin more frequently concealed from the view of those who harbour it, than covetousness. It assumes the names of prudence and economy; and, under the semblance of a care for one's family, is too generally regarded as a virtue. If it do not instigate us to the violation of common honesty, or totally deaden all the feelings of humanity, it is applauded by others, and serves as a foundation for self-approbation and self-complacency. But the love of money is the root of all

evil^a: it is a base lust, it is the vilest idolatry^b: it sets up mammon in preference to God; and must therefore of necessity provoke the Lord to jealousy. But we are not to confine our views to this particular sin: this indeed was predominant among the Jews, as it is amongst us; but it is here mentioned only as indicating the general depravity that prevailed amongst them.]

While God notices it with abhorrence, he shews, by many visible marks, his indignation against it—

[God is not an unconcerned spectator of iniquity: delighted as he is in exercising mercy, he is not inattentive to the demands of justice, or indifferent about the honour of his holiness. On the contrary, he is “wroth,” and justly wroth, with the workers of iniquity; nor does he fail to manifest his displeasure against them. He “hides himself” from them, withdrawing those gracious influences which he had at any time bestowed, and withholding those communications of light and strength, which he might otherwise have imparted to them. He “smites them” either with temporal or spiritual calamities. Perhaps he visits them with sickness in their own persons, or trouble in their families, or distress in their circumstances: and if they would inquire of God, they might find the cause of their calamities to be some hidden abomination which he is punishing^c. Perhaps the judgments are rather of a spiritual nature: he “heweth them by his prophets,” and at the same time smites them with judicial blindness and obduracy^d; he gives them over to their own delusions^e; he seals them up under final impenitence and unbelief^f. These strokes are terrible in proportion to the insensibility with which they are received; and the less the sinner’s apprehension of danger is, the more awful is the judgment inflicted on him.]

But Divine chastisements, unattended with the operations of grace, never produce the desired effect—

[Notwithstanding ten successive plagues, Pharaoh continued to harden his heart against God. Thus it is with sinners in general: they either relent not at all, or, like metal taken out of the furnace, relapse immediately into their former state of obduracy. For the most part, “though God strikes them, they will not grieve; though he even consumes them, they refuse to receive correction; they make their faces harder than a rock, and refuse to return^g.” “They are mad upon their

^a 1 Tim. vi. 10.

^b Col. iii. 5.

^c See Acts xii. 23. and 1 Cor. xi. 30, 32.

^d Hos. vi. 5. Isai. vi. 9, 10. Exod. xiv. 4.

^e Isai. lxvi. 4.

^f 2 Thess. ii. 11. Rom. i. 24, 26, 28.

^g Jer. v. 3.

idols; so that though, like Ezekiel's followers, they delight to hear the word, they will not *do* it, but still yield to the corrupt bias within them^h; too many of them, instead of being reclaimed by God's chastisements, continue, like Ahaz, to trespass yet more and more against himⁱ.]

Now then how shall this controversy be brought to a successful issue? it can only be in,

II. The way which he takes to terminate it—

One might well suppose that God, who sees iniquity in all its aggravations, would give vent to his indignation by destroying those who commit it—

[On some occasions God has signally interposed to execute vengeance on the sinners of mankind^k. And it is a miracle of mercy that he endures any with such long-suffering and forbearance. When he sees both his mercies and his judgments despised, and that his endeavours to reclaim sinners issue in nothing but disappointment, we might well expect him to swear in his wrath, that such daring transgressors should never enter into his rest.]

But he determines rather to save them by an exertion of sovereign and almighty grace—

[Jeremiah informs us, that, when God knew not, as it were, how to restore the backsliding Israelites, so as to put them among the number of his children, he adopted this resolution; “Thou *shalt* call me, my Father, and *shalt* not turn away from me^l.” Thus in the passage before us he says, “I have seen his ways, and (what? will destroy him utterly? No:) will heal him.” What marvellous condescension! what unbounded mercy! How should it melt the most obdurate heart! God will apply the balm of Gilead to the consciences of sinners; “he will heal their backslidings and love them freely.” Nay, further, he will take them by the hand, and however far they may have strayed, he will bring them back unto his fold, and “lead” them in safety to his heavenly kingdom. Nor will he leave them destitute even of present “comforts:” the peace and happiness, which they have in vain sought for in the ways of sin, he will give in the paths of righteousness and true holiness.]

It is to be remembered, however, that he will first make them “mourn” for their transgressions—

^h Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

ⁱ 2 Chron. xxviii. 22.

^k Numb. xvi. 31, 32. 1 Cor. x. 1—10.

^l Jer. iii. 19.

[While sinners continue obstinate, it is not possible that they should obtain favour with the Lord. God must altogether deny himself before he can receive the impenitent. He has declared that all must repent, or perish^m; and that it is in a way of weeping and supplication that he will lead them to himselfⁿ. It is the broken and contrite heart alone that he will not despise^o. He says, "Only acknowledge thine iniquity:" and when his time is come for subduing a sinner to the obedience of faith, he will "take away his stony heart, and give him a heart of flesh^p;" he will first "give him repentance; and then remission of sin^q." He will cause him to become a mourner in Zion; and then will give him beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness^r.]

This subject may lead us to OBSERVE,

1. Of what importance it is to search out the hidden corruptions of our hearts!

[Covetousness is a sin of which scarce any persons in the world acknowledge themselves guilty: nor, however much they be under the power of it, do they see any occasion for humiliation before God, provided they be free from gross and scandalous offences. But the predominance of that, or any other vile affection in the heart, may fill God with wrath against us, and cause him to "hide his face" from us for ever, and to "smite" us with his heaviest judgments. Should we not then be afraid of "speaking peace to ourselves, when there is no peace^s?" Should we not beg of God to give us increasing views of those chambers of imagery, where ten thousand abominations lurk unseen^t? Should we not with all diligence search our hearts, to find whether there be *any* way of wickedness allowed within us^u? Let there be a holy jealousy in every breast: and let the utmost care be used, lest we deceive ourselves to our eternal ruin.]

2. How necessary is it to notice the dealings of God towards us!

[If we meet with temporal afflictions, we should regard them as sent by God; and though they are tokens of love to his people, yet are they indications of wrath to his enemies; and, whether we be converted or not, they have a voice which it becomes us to hear with attention and reverence^x. If we are visited with spiritual judgments, if God hides his face

^m Luke xiii. 3.

ⁿ Jer. xxxi. 9.

^o Ps. li. 17.

^p Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

^q Acts v. 31.

^r Isai. lxi. 3.

^s Jer. vi. 14.

^t Ezek. viii. 6—15.

^u Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

^x Mic. vi. 9.

from us in the ordinances, and withholds the influences of his Spirit, we should still more earnestly inquire, wherefore God contendeth with us^y? Perhaps we should find that God is “wroth” on account of our pride, ambition, worldliness, or some other hateful lust; and that, as he would not hear the Jews even “when they made many prayers, because their hands were full of blood,” so some cursed abomination has provoked him to withdraw from us. If we perceive no particular trial, either temporal or spiritual, we must not even then conclude that all is well, since it is the very nature of spiritual judgments to blind the eyes, and sear the conscience, and harden the heart. Of this we may be sure; that whether our outward circumstances be prosperous or adverse, they are equally calls and invitations from God; and are intended as incentives to gratitude and humiliation. Let us then both notice and improve his works of providence and grace; let us improve them by obeying him that calls, and “turning unto him that smites us.”]

3. How thankfully should we accept the present offers of his mercy!

[Now, notwithstanding all our “frowardness,” the voice of mercy sounds in our ears. But how vain will it be to wish for one such promise in the eternal world! God will not then say, “I will *heal him*,” but, “I have seen his ways, and will *execute vengeance on him* to the uttermost.” Now God would “comfort us” if we turned to him with “mourning;” but then, though we weep and wail ever so much, he will not vouchsafe to us one glimpse of his favour, or the smallest possible mitigation of our pain. Let us then entertain a grateful sense of his unspeakable kindness. Let us “turn to him with weeping and with mourning.” Let us humble ourselves in the dust before him; and pray, that, where sin has abounded, his grace may much more abound^z.]

^y Job x. 2.

^z Rom. v. 20.

DCCCCXCI.

NO PEACE TO THE WICKED.

Isai. lvii. 20, 21. *The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*

WE need not wait till a future life in order to discern the difference between the righteous and the

wicked: it is plainly discoverable now in their conduct; nor is it less so in the inward frame of their minds. To a superficial observer indeed the wicked may seem to have the advantage; they being light and gay, while the righteous are often weary and heavy-laden: but God, who sees through the veil of outward appearances, affirms the very reverse of this to be true. We shall,

I. Confirm this divine assertion—

There certainly is a kind of peace which the wicked may, and do, possess—

[By the “wicked” we are not necessarily to understand, those who are vicious and profane; but all persons who are not devoted to God in the habitual exercise of righteousness and true holiness. And when it is said that such persons have “no peace,” we must not imagine that they have no comfort or satisfaction in earthly enjoyments; for they are full of life and spirit; they shake off what they call melancholy; they banish all thoughts of God, and indulge in conviviality and mirth^a; and, as far as animal gratifications can conduce to happiness, they are happy. Neither must we suppose them wholly destitute of what they mistake for peace: they often persuade themselves of the safety of their state, and in a very confident manner assert their relation to God as his children^b. Having fixed the standard of duty according to their own mind; and finding that, for the most part, they attain to what they deem a sufficient measure of religion, they “speak peace unto themselves, when alas! there is no peace^c” —]

But of the peace of the gospel they are wholly ignorant—

[The peace, which our Lord gives to his faithful followers, and which he emphatically calls *his* peace^d, is very different from any thing which an unregenerate man has ever experienced. It consists in a well-grounded hope of acceptance through Christ;” and in “the testimony of our conscience” that we are walking agreeably to his mind and will. This peace is not a blind persuasion contrary to all the declarations of God’s word, but an humble confidence founded upon the sacred oracles, and a joyful expectation that God will fulfil his gracious promises. Now such a peace as this, the wicked never feel: they do not seek it; they would not even accept it upon

^a Isai. v. 11, 12.

^b John viii. 39, 41.

^c Jer. vi. 14.

^d John xiv. 27.

God's terms, because they would not submit to have their conduct regulated by his holy law: indeed they account the experience of it to be the height of enthusiasm, and suppose that they who profess to have attained it are actuated by pride, and blinded by delusion. Can it then be any wonder that such persons should never enjoy this peace themselves?]

The truth of this assertion will more clearly appear while we,

II. Shew the grounds and reasons of it—

We need not look further than the text to find ample materials for confirming the declaration before us: for it asserts that the wicked are in a state absolutely incompatible with true peace. "Like the troubled sea they can never rest" by reason of,

1. Depraved appetites—

[However eminent for piety men may be, it is certain they will find much occasion for sorrow on account of their inward depravity: but they strive to mortify their lusts; they resist them in their first rise; and pray to God for strength to subdue them: whereas the wicked, however moral they may outwardly appear, encourage the growth of their vile affections: instead of repressing inward impurity, they enjoy the company, they relish the conversation, they read the books, they frequent the amusements, which have a tendency to foster their corruptions; and, though from prudential considerations they impose a restraint on their actions, they will harbour evil thoughts without resistance and without remorse. The same may be said respecting their worldliness, their ambition, and every other evil appetite. As the Apostle says of the impure, that they have "eyes full of adultery, and that they cannot cease from sin," so, whatever else be the predominant passion of their hearts, they cease not from the indulgence of it; but yield to it as far as they can consistently with the preservation of their character in the world. How then can they possess peace, whose hearts are so disturbed and defiled by their depraved affections?—]

2. Ungoverned tempers—

[There is indeed a wonderful difference in the natural tempers and dispositions of men, insomuch that one person, notwithstanding his real piety, shall have much to conflict with, while another shall feel comparatively but little temptation to transgress. Still however, the righteous will have peace, because they labour to bring their minds into subjection to Christ, and apply to the blood of Christ for pardon under

every renewed failure; but the wicked have not peace, because they neither cry to the Lord to pardon their evil tempers, nor pray to him for grace to subdue them. Whatever be their besetting sin, they will fall into it as soon as ever a temptation occurs. Is it *pride*? they will be inflamed at the smallest insult or opposition; and, like Haman, feel no comfort in life, because they are not treated with all the reverence they think due to them^e. Is it *envy*? they cannot endure to behold the success of a rival; but, like Saul, would be glad to hear that he were brought down, or even that he were dead^f. Is it *covetousness*? they shall have no enjoyment of all that they possess, because they have sustained a loss, or been, like Ahab, disappointed in their hopes of attaining something whereon their heart was set^g. Is it *malice and revenge*? they shall sometimes be so inflamed by the very sight of their enemy, or even by the recollection of the injury they have sustained, that their very blood shall boil within them, and their rest day and night depart from them. Now what room is there for peace in a bosom that is subject to such continual agitation; and which, like the sea, not only is disturbed by every wind, but the instant it is moved, “casts up nothing but mire and dirt?”—]

3. An evil conscience—

[Much as they strive to shake off reflection about a future state, they cannot wholly dissipate their fears: in the midst of all their boasted confidence they have some secret misgivings: and if a sickness, which they expect to be fatal, come upon them, they cannot help wishing that their life had been differently spent, and that they might be spared to obtain a better preparation for their appearance before God. Sometimes indeed they do hold fast their delusions to the last, and “God gives them over to believe a lie:” but, for the most part, they both live under the accusations of a guilty conscience, and die under an awful suspense, a dreadful uncertainty about their eternal state. If at any time their minds be awakened to a sense of their true condition, they will tremble, like Belshazzar, when he saw the writing on the wall^h, or, like Felix, when Paul reasoned with him about righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to comeⁱ. Is it possible that peace should consist with such a state as this? Or need we any thing more to confirm the testimony of God respecting them, That they have no peace?—]

This subject cannot fail of SUGGESTING to us,

1. The bitterness of sin—

^e Esther v. 9, 12, 13. ^f 1 Sam. xviii. 6—9. and xix. 1.

^g 1 Kings xxi. 1—4. ^h Dan. v. 5, 6. ⁱ Acts xxiv. 25.

[Men live in sin under the idea that it will make them happy; but though they “roll it as a sweet morsel under their tongue, it proves the very gall of asps within them^k.” It is that which robs us of all solid peace: it is that which renders us altogether incapable of peace, as long as it retains an ascendant over us. We may appeal to the consciences of all who are indulging sin, whether in heart or act, Have you peace? Do you know what it is to have “the love of God shed abroad in your hearts;” to have “the witness of his Spirit” testifying of your adoption into his family; and to look forward with pleasure to your appearance at his tribunal? We are sure that no unregenerate man whatever can answer in the affirmative. And why can he not? is it not on account of sin, sin indulged, sin unrepented of? See, then, brethren, what an accursed thing sin is, which robs you of all that is truly valuable; of peace in life, and hope in death, and happiness in eternity. And will you yet harbour it in your hearts? O flee from it as from the face of a serpent; and let it be the one labour of your lives to mortify and subdue it—]

2. The excellency of the Gospel—

[Fatal as sin has proved to the present and everlasting welfare of thousands, the gospel offers a full and sufficient remedy. The words before the text are quoted by an inspired apostle in proof that Jesus is our peace, and that having made reconciliation for us through the blood of his cross, he preaches peace to them that are afar off, and to them that are near^l. Blessed be God, there is efficacy in the blood of Jesus to heal the wounds which sin has made: if it be sprinkled on our hearts by faith, it will purge us from an evil conscience, and speak peace to our souls^m. Apply but that remedy, and you shall soon feel its transcendent worth and efficacy. “May the Lord of peace himself” reveal to you his truth, and “give you peace always by all meansⁿ.” May you be so “justified by faith as to have peace with God;” and may that “peace of God which passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus^o”—]

^k Job xx. 12—14.

^l ver. 19. with Eph. ii. 13—17.

^m Heb. x. 22. and xii. 24. ⁿ 2 Thess. iii. 16.

^o Phil. iv. 7.

DCCCCXCII.

THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE.

Isai. lviii. 1. *Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.*

CERTAINLY, one of God's richest mercies unto man has been the appointment of an order of men to be his ambassadors to a guilty world, and to beseech their fellow-sinners to be reconciled to him. The ungodly indeed have never appreciated this mercy aright: for, from the very beginning of the world, have the Prophets of the Most High been regarded as "the troublers of Israel," fit objects for hatred and contempt. "Which of the prophets," says our blessed Lord, "have not your fathers persecuted?" But when a dispensation is committed to any man to declare the mind and will of God, woe will be unto him if he execute not the office that has been assigned him.

The words which I have read will naturally lead me to set before you,

I. The office of a minister—

This is, "to shew to men their transgressions and their sins." But it may be asked, What need is there for their services for such an end as this? Do not all of us know ourselves better than any one else can know us? Can any one be so well acquainted with the workings of my heart, or with the actions of my life, as I myself am? To this, however, I answer, that,

1. The world at large stand in need of such monitors—

[There is, in the generality of men, a thoughtlessness about their ways; so that they are altogether unconscious of having contracted any great guilt. They never consider the requirements of God's Law; they never refer their conduct to any other standard than public opinion; and they rest satisfied that all is right, so long as they do not violate the laws which the common consent of those around them has established for the regulation of their lives. As for the spirituality of God's Law, they are utterly unacquainted with it; and consequently they never dream of their responsibility to God for any thing beyond their overt acts: or, if they think themselves accountable for their motives, they give themselves credit for *meaning well*, even where they are conscious of having *acted ill*: and, though their actions have not been altogether correct, they persuade themselves that their hearts are good, and that their aberrations from the path of duty have been the result of chance

rather than design, and of temptation rather than of any inveterate propensity to evil.]

2. Those also who are called “God’s people,” and who consider themselves as “the seed of Jacob,” are not a whit less in need of instructors than the careless world—

[See the account given of those to whom the prophet was sent: “They sought God daily; and delighted to know his ways, even as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinances of their God: they even asked of God the ordinances of justice; they took delight in approaching unto God^a.” Could such as these have any transgressions of which they needed to be informed, and any sins which endangered their souls? Yes: “their hearts were not right with God:” they were “partial in the law:” they put their outward obedience in the place of vital godliness: they trusted in their works also as recommending them to God, and as forming a justifying righteousness before him; and they even complained that God did not recompense them according to their deserts. And how many such characters are found amongst *us*! how many, who, whilst they find pleasure in attending upon the House of God, imagine that, by their religious observances, they shall entitle themselves to his favour!

Now, in reference to all such characters, I must say, that the duty of ministers is to “shew them their sins.” It is their duty to search out, for the information of others, the mind and will of God; and to bring home to the consciences of all a sense of their manifold transgressions. They must endeavour to hold up before men the glass of God’s Law, that they may see the deformity of their own fallen image, and be stirred up to seek reconciliation with their offended God. To every one must they point out the sins which most easily beset him; and declare to him the judgments which God, in his word, has denounced against him.]

Whilst we assert this to be their duty, it will be proper for us to notice,

II. The manner in which it must be discharged—

The direction here given is clear and strong. Those who have received a commission to speak for God must deliver their message,

1. With earnestness—

[Mere advice or friendly counsel is not that which becomes them on such occasions as these: “they must cry aloud,

^a ver. 2.

and lift up their voice as a trumpet," if by any means they may awaken the drowsy consciences of those to whom they speak. Viewing themselves as ambassadors from God, they must speak with all authority, fearing the face of none; but declaring the truth, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear: and they must shew, by the very manner in which they deliver their divine message, that it is a matter of life and death; and that the word they utter is "not the word of man, but indeed and in truth the word of God."]

2. With fidelity—

[They must "not spare," even though the offender be ever so great and powerful, or ever so dear and tenderly regarded. As John the Baptist reprov'd Herod, in whose hands his life was, so must they approve themselves faithful even to the mightiest upon earth. They must shew no respect of persons, nor conceal any thing which they are authorized to declare; but must be impartial in their reproofs, and make known "the whole counsel of God." "Having received God's word, they must speak it faithfully." They must be faithful for God's sake, whose ambassadors they are; and for the people's sake, whose eternal welfare is at stake; and for their own sake, seeing that "if any perish through their want of faithfulness, the blood of all such persons will be required at their hands."]

Permit me now, Brethren, to discharge my office with respect to you—

1. To those who are altogether careless and indifferent—

[You may imagine that God takes no notice of your sins: but indeed they are all viewed by him with abhorrence, and recorded by him in the book of his remembrance, in order that they may be brought forth against you at the future judgment. True it is, that if you repent of them, they shall all be "blotted out, as a morning cloud:" but if you remain impenitent, they will all be visited upon you, and sink you into everlasting perdition. I have no wish to alarm you needlessly; but I must, at the peril of my own soul, declare the truth; and must say, that except ye repent, ye shall all perish. But "if ye repent, and turn from all your transgressions," I am authorized to declare, that "your iniquities shall not be your ruin."]

2. To those who account themselves the people of God—

[I ask not now, whether ye be self-righteous formalists, or hypocritical professors: but, of whichever class ye be, I

must declare, that “ God is not mocked; but whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he only who soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” Do not imagine that God will judge according to the estimate which you form of yourselves. No: He will take off the mask from the hypocrite, and judge every man according to his works. Intreat him, then, to put “ truth in your inward parts, and to make you altogether new creatures in Christ Jesus; so shall you be accepted in his beloved Son, and stand before him with boldness in the great day of his appearing.”]

DCCCCXCIII.

THE SERVICES WHICH GOD REQUIRES.

Isai. lviii. 5—11. *Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burthens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; and if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day: and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters fail not.*

IT is not uncommon for persons who are hypocrites at heart, to make a great profession of religion, and even to complain of God himself, as not recompensing sufficiently their zeal in his cause. The Pharisee who boasted of his fastings and his alms-deeds, is a just representation of this character. But against such persons it is the duty of a minister to

bear the most decided testimony. The injunction given to the prophet was, "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." And what were the transgressions that were to be so severely censured? Was it an entire neglect of ordinances? No: it is acknowledged that the people abounded in the externals of religion: "They seek me early," says God, "and delight to know my ways as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinances of justice: they take delight in approaching to God." But in the midst of all this pretended zeal for godliness, they were insincere at heart. Their observance of duties proceeded from a principle of pride, and was intended as a cloak for their hidden abominations. Their very "fasts" were nothing but a display of the vilest hypocrisy, which God abhorred. The prophet, being commanded to reprobate such odious conduct, states to them what their fasts should be, in order to be accepted and approved by God.

In considering this statement we shall shew,

I. What, in their seasons of humiliation, was required of God's people of old—

They were called to express their contrition by fasting^a. But the outward service, however humble in appearance, was not acceptable to God, unless attended with suitable dispositions of mind, and amendment of life. Hence the prophet appealed to the people themselves, that, to evince the sincerity of their devotions, there must be a change in their whole conduct, and an habitual practice of the long-neglected duties of justice and charity.

[The Jews, both before and after the Babylonish captivity, were much addicted to extortion and oppression^b. To make restitution to those whom they had defrauded, and reduced to bondage; to refrain from "putting forth the finger" in a way of scorn and menace against those whom they had

^a Joel ii. 15—17.

^b Jer. xxxiv. 9—11. with Neh. v. 5.

injured, or from deceiving them by “vain promises” of compensation; and to “break entirely every yoke,” whereby they had galled and oppressed their brethren—*these* were the very first acts required to evince the sincerity of their repentance; since with the commission of such cruelties not the smallest measure of real penitence could consist.

But to the reformation of these habits God required them to add the exercise of mercy. They must “feed the hungry and clothe the naked,” and consider every child of man as a brother whom they should regard “as their own flesh:” they were to take the most destitute of the human race, and “bring him, if occasion so required, to their own house,” for the purpose of affording him more effectual relief: they were to feel such sympathy with him, as to “draw out,” not merely their purse, but even “their very souls,” for his relief; and so to apportion their benevolence, as to aim at not merely comforting, but “satisfying, his afflicted soul.” *This* is the spirit which God loves; *this* he approves infinitely beyond all outward services of whatever kind; and *this* he required of his people, as the best proof of a regenerate heart, and as the surest evidence of their love to him.]

Such a change as this, he assured them, should bring down upon their souls the richest blessings.

[They might have seasons of darkness and distress, even as others; or they might be calumniated by evil men, yea, and be harassed by cruel persecutions: but, if they abounded in the heavenly dispositions before specified, “their light should break forth as the morning, and their darkness be as the noon-day; yea, their health should spring forth speedily;” and they should experience in their own souls far richer consolations than they ever did, or could, administer to their afflicted brethren: “their righteousness, which had been impeached, should go before them,” to testify their real character; and “the glory of the Lord should be their rereward,” interposing between them and their persecutors, like the cloud and pillar of fire, for their effectual preservation and protection. Whatever they might want, they should have liberty of access to God for it; and upon their crying to him for it, he would present himself before them, saying, “Here I am; here I am; and whatever thou wantest I will give thee.” Should they be in doubt how to act, “the Lord would guide them continually:” should they be in any particular necessity or distress, he would “satisfy their souls in drought, and even make fat their bones,” insomuch that *their graces should flourish* “like a well-watered garden,” and *their consolations abound* “like a spring of water whose waters fail not.”]

Now this leads me to shew,

II. What God requires of us at this time—

There is a special call, both from God in his providence, and from the highest authorities in the realm, to humble ourselves at this time in fasting and prayer. But we must be careful not to think that a mere outward service will be of any avail, if we add not to it that reformation of heart and life which God calls for at our hands: I say then that,

1. He requires of us the same duties as of his people of old—

[We must put away from us every thing that is contrary to love, and live in the habitual exercise of love in all its branches. There are many things, the offspring of pride and selfishness, sanctioned by the habits of the world, which yet we should be careful not to practise — — —

When addressing you on a day of *national humiliation*, I may well advert to that great national sin of holding thousands of our fellow-creatures in bondage, and treating them as though they had neither the rights nor feelings of humanity — — — Whilst this continues, God cannot but have a controversy with us; nor can we expect any thing at his hands but to be visited with his heaviest displeasure — — — But there are manifold instances of oppression which obtain amongst ourselves in our daily intercourse with mankind, which, though not of the same flagrant nature with the slave-trade, are most offensive in the sight of God: and against these we should, all of us individually, be on our guard; for God is the avenger of the injured party, whosoever he may be, and will call us to account for all the evils that we inflict upon him.

But this is a small, a very small, part of the duty which we owe to our brethren of mankind. We should regard our fellow-creature, how poor and destitute soever he may be, “as our own flesh,” and be as anxious for the relief of his necessities, as we should for the ease and welfare of a member of our own body. The extent to which our charity should be carried, should know no other bounds than the necessities of our brother, and our own ability to relieve him. And such should be our delight in these exercises of love, that they should call forth all the finest feelings of our souls, and administer to ourselves a more exquisite joy than the communication of any benefits can confer on the receiver of them.

This is the proper employment of a season like this; and,

without it, our external sacrifices will be no better than “the cutting off a dog’s neck, or the offering of swine’s blood^c.”]

2. He extends to us the same encouragements—

[There is in the minds of many religious people a very undue jealousy on the subject of charity, as entailing on those who abound in it a rich reward. But the Scriptures are full of declarations to this effect; and God even declares that he would esteem himself “unrighteous^d,” if he omitted to recompense to us the benefits which for his sake we confer on others. True, our works of charity shall not *go before us, to obtain the favour of God for the remission of our sins*. Nothing but the blood of Christ can avail for *that*; nor can any thing but his perfect righteousness imputed to us, form a justifying righteousness for us, even though we gave all our goods to feed the poor, or our bodies to be burned. But our deeds of charity, if springing from faith in Christ, and love to his name, “will follow us^e,” as evidences of the divine principle within us, and as memorials of our desire to serve and honour God in his appointed way.

But we need go no further than to the passage before us, to see what testimonies of his approbation God will vouchsafe to all who live in the exercise of love. Our acts may have been so private, that “our right hand has not known what our left hand has done:” but God himself will bear witness to us, and bring forth our works, not only as objects of his approbation, but as grounds on which he will proceed in apportioning the glory that shall be awarded to us^f. At this present time also he will bestow such blessings as can scarcely be conceived. Take the different expressions in my text: analyse them: apply them to the soul in all their extent and amplitude: view them as suited to all the necessities that can possibly arise: and see God himself as pledged to carry them all into effect: and then regard them all but as a prelude to the glory that shall be accorded to us at the instant of our departure hence: in a word, only enter fully into the promises here made to God’s ancient people, and you will need nothing more to evince the excellence of love, and the blessedness of those who lay themselves out for God in the discharge of its high duties.]

SEE NOW,

1. How to turn to a good account the services of this day^g—

^c Isai. i. 10—17. and lxvi. 3.

^d Heb. vi. 10.

^e Rev. xiv. 13.

^f Matt. xxv. 34—36.

^g By a slight alteration of these words the subject may be adapted to a *fast approaching*, or *present*, or *past*.

[Though the outward tokens of humiliation should not be neglected, the inward rectification of the soul should be our chief aim. We should “break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor^h.” To do justly and to love mercy are the chief things which God requires of us as proofs and evidences of our sincerity in humbling ourselves before him. If then we would spend an acceptable day unto the Lord, let us set ourselves earnestly to the work marked out for us by God himself, rectifying whatever we know to have been amiss in our conduct, and fulfilling to the uttermost every office of compassion and love. We must distinguish indeed between what we do in order to *obtain acceptance with God*, and what we do to *please and honour him*. To *obtain mercy* at his hands, we must simply *believe in Christ*: but to *glorify his name* we must search out all possible occasions of doing good, and *promote to the utmost of our ability the edification and happiness of all around us*.]

2. How to obtain a very heaven upon earth—

[Religious professors, when they enjoy but little comfort in their own souls, are apt to ascribe it to a sense of their own unworthiness, and to regard it rather as a proof of their humility. But in most instances, I believe, it must be traced to an habitual neglect, or a very partial performance, of the offices of love. The generality are too selfish in their habits, and too regardless of the necessities of their fellow-creatures, and the honour of their God. We have seen in the passage before us what God would do for us, if we laid ourselves out for him in the duties and offices of love. He has told us that, “to water others is the way to be ourselves watered,” and to mete out liberally to others is the way to have good measure poured into our own bosom. Let us then abound more and more in every good work; and we shall surely find, that “the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for everⁱ.”]

^h Dan. iv. 27.

ⁱ Isai. xxxii. 17.

DCCCCXCIV.

OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH ENJOINED.

Isai. lviii. 13, 14. *If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, The holy of the Lord, Honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon*

the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father : for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

THAT the observance of the Sabbath was intended to be of universal and perpetual obligation, does not admit of any reasonable doubt. It was enjoined to man in Paradise : and the commandment relating to it, when renewed to man at Mount Sinai, was, like all the other moral commandments, written by God himself on tables of stone. The Jewish prophets spake of it as to be continued under the Gospel dispensation^a : and the Apostles evidently continued the observance of it, transferring it only from the last day of the week to the first, in commemoration of our Lord's resurrection from the dead, and of the work of redemption which was thereby completed^b. The ceremonial laws relating to it are abrogated ; but the moral part of it is as much in force as ever.

In the passage before us we may see,

I. In what light we should view the Sabbath—

The estimation in which it should be held is here variously expressed : we are taught to account that day,

1. Holy—

[Whatever was consecrated to God under the law was accounted holy : it was separated from all profane or common use, and was employed solely for the ends and purposes for which it had been thus set apart. Thus the Sabbath, being consecrated to the especial service of God, is called in our text "God's holy day;" and, "The holy of the Lord." In the New Testament also it is called, "The Lord's day^c." Hence it is obvious, that every part of it is to be regarded as the Lord's property, and to be improved for him alone. We should feel a veneration for it, precisely as we should for any thing else that had been dedicated to the Lord : and, as we shudder at the impiety of Belshazzar in using, at a feast, the sacred vessels which he had taken from Jerusalem, though he himself was not a worshipper of Jehovah ; much more must we, who acknowledge the sanctity of the Sabbath, shudder at the thought of alienating any portion of it from Him, to whom it exclusively belongs.]

^a See Isai. lvi. 1, 4, 6.

^b See John xx. 19, 26. Acts xx. 7. 1 Cor. xvi. 2. ^c Rev. i. 10

2. Honourable—

[If any man, under the Law, had regarded the Temple, the sacrifices, and the vessels of the sanctuary, in no other light than as a common house, or common utensils, or common food, he would have been considered as greatly dishonouring God. Thus the very sanctity of the Sabbath should render it “honourable” in our estimation; and we should labour to “honour it” by every possible expression of our regard.]

3. Delightful—

[The arrival of that day should be greeted by us with holy joy: we should say, “This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” If we could suppose an angel sent down to this lower world to labour in some common occupation, and permitted every seventh day to return to his heavenly abodes, and spend that day in the employments suited to his taste, with what delight would he look forward to the stated returns of that day! So should it be with us; and so it *will* be, in proportion as we have attained to the views and dispositions of those blessed spirits. Not that we should delight in it merely as a day of rest to the body, but as a day wherein God calls us, like Moses, to come up and commune with him on his holy mount: and, instead of abridging it, or complaining of it as long and wearisome, we should rather say, with Peter, “It is good for us to be here;” and should almost regret the arrival of the period when we must descend from the mount, to the less-pleasing occupations of time and sense.]

But we will proceed to state more particularly,

II. In what manner we should employ it—

In what manner we should *not* employ it, is here distinctly told us—

[Worldly business, and carnal pleasure, and unprofitable conversation, are all expressly proscribed: “we must not do our own ways, nor find our own pleasure, nor speak our own words.” On all the other days of the week we may find time for these things; but on the Sabbath-day they are to be excluded altogether. It is a grievous mistake to imagine, that after the public services of the day we are at liberty to engage in vain pursuits, invented only to beguile the time, which otherwise would be a burthen upon our hands: there are pursuits proper to the day; and in them exclusively should our time be occupied. We do not mean to say, that such things as can neither be anticipated nor postponed may not be done with innocence: for even under the Law, a latitude was allowed in relation to “what every man must eat^d.” In reference to

^d Exod. xii. 16.

such things as are really necessary, we are authorized to say, that "God will have mercy, and not sacrifice:" but it becomes all to be on their guard, that they do not deceive their own souls; for God can easily distinguish the hidden motives of the heart; and will surely judge our actions as good or evil, according as their quality shall be found in his eyes. If the infringement of the Sabbath be reluctant, as in the extinguishing of a fire, or in the exercise of compassion to man or beast, it is well; but if we be actuated by considerations of ease, or interest, or pleasure, to alienate from God any of that time which ought to be consecrated to his service, we may be assured that we must answer for it in the day of judgment.]

Our one aim on that day must be, to "honour God"—

[The services which we are to render to our God on that day are various, and all compatible with each other. The first undoubtedly are *private*: we should give ourselves in a more peculiar manner to reading, to meditation, to prayer. On every day we should search the Scriptures, but more especially on that day; applying them to our own hearts, examining ourselves by them, and entreating God to make them effectual for the conversion and salvation of our souls. From our closets we should go to worship God in *public*, and to testify before all, our regard for his authority, and our delight in his service. Whilst engaged in the various offices of prayer, or hearing of the word, or of communicating at the table of the Lord, we should be particularly careful that the frame of our minds be suited to the employment in which we are engaged; lest, whilst we profess to be serving God, we be found only mocking and insulting him by hypocritical professions. In the intervals, when we are disengaged from private or public duties, we may relieve our minds, and improve our time, in such as are of a social nature. The visiting of the sick, the comforting of the afflicted, the instructing of the rising generation, and, above all, the endeavouring to teach our children and servants, and to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," are services well pleasing to God, and admirably suited to the sanctity of that holy day. It is much to be feared that this latter duty in particular is sadly neglected, even in religious families; and that the great predilection that has been manifested by the religious world for public services, has brought into disuse those more self-denying offices which formerly occupied a considerable portion of the Sabbath-day. But, in whichever of these duties we are occupied, our great aim must be, to "honour God;" demeaning ourselves as in his more immediate presence, and endeavouring to approve ourselves to him as faithful servants.]

And shall the Sabbath, in this view of it, be accounted a day of gloom? No; we shall have far other sentiments of it, if we consider,

III. The benefits we may expect from a due observance of it—

Whatever reference there may be in our text to the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon, we cannot doubt but that the promises here made have a higher and more spiritual import. In them we are assured, that, if we really keep the Sabbath as we ought, we shall be blessed with,

1. Delight in God—

[There is not any thing which God more delights to honour than a due observance of the Sabbath. We may perform the outward duties of that day, and reap no material benefit: but if we truly and earnestly endeavour to honour God in the way before described, God will draw nigh to us, and reveal himself to us, and fill us with joy and peace in believing. And here we confidently make our appeal to all who have ever laboured to spend a Sabbath to the Lord, whether they have not found such a measure of grace and peace flowing into their souls, as has abundantly recompensed their utmost exertions? Who must not acknowledge that one day thus spent in the courts and in the service of Jehovah, is better than a thousand passed amongst the vain delights of this world^e? And where the Sabbath is thus habitually honoured, we will venture to say, that such happiness will at times flow into the soul, as David experienced, when he said, “My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, whilst my mouth praiseth thee with joyful lips^f:” yes, “they shall be satisfied with the fatness of God’s house; and he will make them drink of the river of his pleasures^g.”]

2. Victory over our spiritual enemies—

[This seems to be the import of that expression, “I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth^h:” and it shall be fulfilled to all who conscientiously improve their Sabbaths to the glory of their God. Too many of those who profess religion, are, it must be confessed, scarcely, if at all, advancing in the divine life: their evil dispositions still retain such an ascendancy over them, as to make them go on heavily all their days. But, if we were to inquire how they spent

^e Ps. lxxxiv. 4, 10. ^f Ps. lxiii. 5. ^g Ps. xxxvi. 8.

^h Compare Deut. xxxii. 13. and xxxiii. 29.

their Sabbaths, and what efforts they made to glorify God in their public, private, and social duties, we should soon find the reason of their slow progress. As our Lord said of some particular evil spirits, "These go not out, but by prayer and fasting," so we may say of the evils which are predominant in many professors of religion, 'They do not give way, because such slight efforts are made upon the Sabbath to subdue them.' If that day were truly and entirely devoted to the Lord, Satan would no longer retain the ungodly as his vassals, nor be able to exert so much influence over those who have professedly cast off his yoke.]

3. The full possession of the heavenly Canaan—

[That land which was given to Jacob for his inheritance, was typical of the Canaan that is above, which truly "floweth with milk and honey." And it may be safely affirmed, that no person who has conscientiously employed his Sabbaths here, ever did, or ever can, fall short of the heavenly rest. Thousands who have perished by the hand of the public executioner, have traced their shame and misery to a neglect of the Sabbath: but never was an instance known of one who duly improved his Sabbaths being left to die under the dominion of his sins. Indeed the services of the Sabbath cannot possibly consist with indulged and wilful sin: on the contrary, they are both a preparation for heaven, and a foretaste of it: on earth the saints behold their God by faith; but in heaven they will behold him face to face: on earth they, as it were, learn and rehearse their parts; but in heaven they will join the full chorus of saints and angels in everlasting hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb.]

SEE hence,

1. How reasonable are the requirements of God in his Gospel!

[Had God required six days out of the seven to be spent in such exercises, it would have been highly reasonable that we should obey him: how much more when he gives us six for earthly business, and requires only one to be consecrated entirely unto him! If the services of that day were ever so painful, they might well be claimed by Him who has done such great things for us: and how much more when they are so delightful and so profitable! Grudge him not then that day, nor any portion of it; but let it be wholly and unreservedly devoted to his service.]

2. How just will be the condemnation of those who disobey them!

[A person who has attained to fifty years of age, has had *above seven years of Sabbaths*. O what blessings might not

have been secured in that time, if all those Sabbaths had been sanctified to the Lord! and what judgments does not he merit, who has wasted all of them in a wilful neglect of God! Little as we think of Sabbaths now, we shall find ere long, that the profaning of them has greatly increased our guilt and misery. The Lord grant that this day may not pass away as so many others have done, unprofitably to our souls; but let it be to every one of us a preparation for our eternal rest!]

DCCCCXCV.

NO PEACE IN THE WAY OF SIN.

Isai. lix. 8. *They have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.*

THIS chapter deserves especial notice, not merely on account of its historical import, but particularly on account of the use made of it by the Apostle Paul. As written by the prophet, it seems descriptive of some peculiarly abandoned characters, who committed all manner of iniquity. But, as quoted by the Apostle, it is descriptive of mankind in general, and marks the entire depravity of our fallen nature. Now, in reading the Epistle to the Romans, we are apt to wonder how an inspired writer could deduce such a doctrine from passages which appear to afford so little foundation for it: for it seems strange to say, that because some pre-eminently wicked persons, of one age and country, were guilty of the most flagrant enormities, all persons, in all ages and countries, must have the same propensities. But I hesitate not to say, that the Apostle's inference is just: for, if any persons enjoying the light of revelation were, notwithstanding all their advantages, so wicked, the fault was not in their accidental circumstances, but in their nature itself; and, consequently, all who possess the same nature must be partakers of the same propensities: and if they yield not to those propensities in the same manner as others, they must owe it, not to any superior goodness of their own, but to the preventing grace of God. It is not my intention to prosecute the subject before us to the extent that the Apostle's

example would justify : I shall satisfy myself with exhibiting,

I. The characters here described—

Of human nature, as born into the world, I forbear to speak : but of men's actions our text gives a just and universal description. We need not go back to the Jews : we need only to look amongst ourselves ; and we shall find that all of us, without exception, whilst in our natural and unconverted state, are guilty of the crime here spoken of ; “ We make us crooked paths.” In proof of which, I will shew you our deviations,

1. From the line of duty prescribed by the law—

[You need not be told, I trust, what the law of God requires : it requires that we “ love God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength ; and that we love our neighbour as ourselves.” But who amongst us has obeyed it ? who has obeyed it for any one day or hour of his whole life ? The truth is, that our whole life has been one continued scene of departure from it. Instead of loving God supremely, we have loved the creature above him, and have sought our happiness in it, rather than in him ; and, instead of loving our neighbours as ourselves, we have lived in one continued state of selfishness ; preferring our own ease, honour, interest, to that of others ; and, in many instances, seeking our own welfare at the expense of that of others. But this matter admits of no doubt : we shall all readily acknowledge our deviations from the perfect law of God ; and that, when tried by that standard, “ every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God.”]

2. From the line of duty prescribed by the Gospel—

[The Gospel is given us to remedy our departures from the law ; and it “ prescribes repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” And how have we obeyed *that* ? Have we mourned over our sins as it became us ? Have we, like the Publican, been so oppressed with a sense of our own unworthiness, that we have not ventured to look up to heaven, but, with downcast eyes, have smitten on our breasts, and cried, “ God be merciful to me, a sinner ? ” — — — Have we also implored mercy in God's appointed way ; pleading the merits of the Redeemer's blood, and seeking reconciliation solely through his all-atoning sacrifice ? And, under a full conviction of the insufficiency of every other help, have we lived

altogether by faith on the Son of God;" and "determined to know nothing, and trust in nothing, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified?" Say, Brethren, can you indeed appeal to God, that, from day to day, he witnesses your sighs and groans and tears, in your secret chamber, and sees you fleeing to the Lord Jesus Christ, just as the manslayer fled from the pursuer of blood to the city of his refuge? Alas! alas! if the truth be spoken, there have been in you as great and habitual deviations from the Gospel, as even from the law itself!]

3. From the line of duty prescribed even by your own conscience—

[Every one has some line which he has prescribed to himself. Now it is not my intention to inquire how far the line of any man accords either with the law or with the Gospel. The point to ascertain is, how far your conduct has agreed with the dictates of your own conscience? You have seen no evil in many of those things which are practised by the world at large: and it is not my intention to arraign your conduct in relation to any thing which your own mind has approved. But the question is, Have you not deviated, and very widely too, from the path which you yourselves have acknowledged to be right? Have you not left undone much which you were persuaded it was your duty to do; and done many things which you knew to be wrong? I again say, whatever latitude your own conscience has allowed you, have you not, in ten thousand instances, gone beyond it; and erred, both by defect and excess, from the very line which you have marked out for yourselves? I cannot doubt one moment what the testimony of your own consciences must be; and that you stand convicted, even in your own minds, of having "made to yourselves crooked paths."]

Having declared the habits of those spoken of in my text, I proceed to mark,

II. The awful condition of their souls—

"Whosoever walketh in the paths before described, cannot know peace." He cannot know it,

1. In life—

[I grant that those who are young and gay, and those who are prospering in the world, may enjoy something which *they call* peace: they may, for the most part, be free from anxieties and troubles in relation to their souls; and may go on in a round of pleasure without any material abatement, so as to account themselves, and be accounted by others, happy. But this continues only whilst they are able to shake off all sense

of God's presence, and all thought of death and judgment. Let but the thoughts of eternity rush into their minds, and there is an end of their gaiety at once: their mind is appalled: and they can find no relief, but in dissipating their unwelcome reflections, and drowning them in business or pleasure. Their peace, even at the best, is only like that which is enjoyed by the brute creation: it is not such as becomes a rational and immortal being. Scriptural peace consists in a state of reconciliation with God, and in the testimony of a good conscience. But how can this be possessed by one who is walking in crooked ways? It cannot be. As the prophet says, in the words before my text, "The way of peace they know not:" yea, rather, when they reflect at all, "they are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked^a." And for the truth of this, I appeal to you, even to the most gay and thoughtless among you. Why are you so averse to think of death and judgment? Is it not that such reflections are a source of pain to you, rather than of holy delight and pleasure? Yes, if once you come to the light, your boasted satisfactions issue in nothing but fear and terror.]

2. In death—

[Here again I must acknowledge, that many delude themselves with a persuasion of their own goodness; or of God's mercy, which prevents him from executing the judgments he has threatened: and by these vain conceits they are buoyed up with a kind of hope, which yet rises but little above a brutish insensibility. As for looking up to God as a reconciled God and Father, and contemplating the blessedness of dwelling in his presence, they have no such thought: the utmost that they hope for, is a freedom from pain. They know not what it is to sprinkle their consciences with the blood of Christ, and to lay hold on the great and precious promises of the Gospel: they have no realizing views of Christ, as their Intercessor with God, or as their Forerunner, who is gone to prepare a place for them in heaven. These are the great constituents of scriptural peace: but of these things they know nothing: it is the upright soul alone whose end resembles this: "his end is peace," in the best and highest sense: but of this, the man who walks in paths of his own has no conception: and, if he be at all awakened to a sense of his condition, he has nothing but "a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation" to consume him.]

3. In the eternal world—

^a Isai. lvii. 20, 21.

[No, verily, there is no peace for the wicked there. At the instant of the departure of the soul from the body, all delusions vanish, and every thing which God has spoken is fulfilled. Then how glad would the sinner be, if rocks or hills could fall upon him, and hide him from the face of his offended God! But that cannot be: into the presence of his Judge must he go; and from him must he receive his eternal doom, even in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, prepared for the devil and his angels. What peace can be possessed there, let the rich man inform you, who wanted a drop of water to cool his tongue. Alas! "they rest not day nor night," but "drink incessantly of the cup of God's wrath and indignation;" and to all eternity will they be occupied in "weeping and wailing, and gnashing their teeth." Such will be the issue of walking in the broad road which leadeth to destruction; nor will any escape it, but those who "enter in at the strait gate, and walk in the narrow way that leadeth unto life."]

ADDRESS—

1. The erring—

[Pause, I pray you, Brethren, and consider whither your feet are tending: for, whether you will believe it or not, they who walk in crooked paths shall never know peace. But, having warned you of this, let me tell you how you may have peace. Blessed be God! there is peace to be obtained through the Lord Jesus Christ, "who is our Peace." Yes: "the day-spring from on high has visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and to *guide our feet into the way of peace.*" Do you ask, How shall I obtain this? I answer, Come to him in penitence and faith; and "you shall surely find rest unto your souls." Let me propose to you the pattern which is to be realized by innumerable multitudes in the latter day: "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters *in a straight way*, wherein they shall not stumble^b." "Return to God" in this way, and then you may rest assured that your past iniquities shall not be your ruin.]

2. Those who are walking in the right way—

[Who is it that has made you to differ? You were once walking in crooked paths, even as others: but God, in his mercy, has stopped you, as he did the persecuting Saul, and "brought you into the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Let a sense of this mercy fill you with thankfulness

^b Jer. xxxi. 9.

to the Lord, and with "compassion to those who are yet ignorant and out of the way" — — — In particular, if a brother be drawn aside into any crooked path, be careful to "restore him in a spirit of meekness; considering yourselves, lest you also be tempted^c" — — — In truth, you must never forget how liable you yourselves are to be drawn aside "by the cunning craftiness of men," or by "the wiles of Satan," or by the power of your indwelling corruptions^d. To this you are exposed, even "after you have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and your last end may actually become worse than your beginning^e." And should you thus "depart from your righteousness, your righteousness wherein you have lived will no more be remembered; but in the sin which you commit you will die^f." Of this you are most solemnly warned by the Prophet David: "As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord will lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel^g." Be much therefore in prayer to God, to "hold up your goings in his paths, that your footsteps slip not." And never imagine, for a moment, that you are beyond the danger of falling: "but let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." In order to this, take diligent heed to your ways; and be careful to "maintain a conscience void of offence towards both God and man." And "despise not little things;" for they will open the way for greater. In a word, let it be your constant endeavour to "be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, *in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation*, shining among them as lights in the world^h." Then shall you possess the peace of God, which passeth all understanding; and I also shall "re-joice, in that I have not run in vain nor laboured in vainⁱ."]

^c Gal. vi. 1. Heb. xii. 12, 13.

^d 2 Pet. ii. 18.

^e 2 Pet. ii. 20.

^f Ezek. xxxiii. 18.

^g Ps. cxxv. 5.

^h Phil. ii. 15.

ⁱ Phil. ii. 16.

DCCCCXCVI.

THE RIGHTEOUS A PREY TO THE WICKED.

Isai. lix. 15. *He that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey.*

IT may sometimes appear unreasonable to take portions of Scripture which describe the state and character of the Jews in former days, and to apply them to ourselves at this day. But it must be remembered, that human nature is the same in all

ages; and under the same circumstances will betray the same infirmities.

This will account for St. Paul's mode of proving the total depravity of our nature, and the consequent impossibility of our being ever justified by the works of the law. He cites from different parts of Scripture a great variety of passages, which describe the state of the wicked Jews at different periods of their history: and those passages he adduces, to shew how fallen our nature is. Some of the most humiliating parts of his description are taken from this very chapter, which confessedly portrays the character of the most abandoned Jews at a period of extreme degeneracy^a. An objector might say, This is not equitable: and I do not admit that the worst of the Jews in their most degenerate days are any just criterion for judging of human nature generally. But the Apostle might reply, that, if any persons so highly favoured as the Jews could attain to such heights of impiety as they assuredly did, the fault must be, not in the circumstances in which they were placed, but in human nature itself; which would betray the same dispositions in others, if they were subjected to the same trials. Hence, without hesitation, I take the words of our text as containing a general truth, and as asserting a fact which will be found to exist in all ages and countries of the world: "He that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey."

It is my intention,

I. To establish this fact—

This will be found true in all former ages—

[Go back to the days of Cain and Abel; and there you will find, that the very first man who was born of our fallen parents murdered his own brother, for no other reason than this, "because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous^b." Proceed downward through all successive periods of the world, and behold Noah derided for his belief in God's word; Lot menaced for refusing to concur in the most horrible abominations that human nature could commit; Elijah deemed the troubler of Israel, because he withstood idolatry; and all

^a Compare ver. 7, 8. with Rom. iii. 15—18. ^b 1 John iii. 12.

the prophets in succession reviled and persecuted by the people amongst whom they dwelt: as our Lord says, "Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?" Every one of them might adopt the language of David, and say, "They that render evil for good are against me, because I follow the thing that good is^c."

If under any circumstances a holy person could escape persecution, we might well suppose that our blessed Lord would have escaped it; both because his whole life was employed in doing good to the bodies, as well as the souls, of men; and because his wisdom infinitely exceeded that of any other of mankind, seeing that "he spake" on all occasions "as never man spake." But so far was he from being an exception to the general rule, that he was an object of more inveterate hatred in proportion to the transcendent excellence of his character. There never existed upon earth one so spotless as he, nor one who was an object of such universal hatred and abhorrence^d. His Apostles after him were all treated with the same kind of indignities, wherever they went; their converts also in every country experiencing the same lot; even as many of our own countrymen did at the time of the Reformation. There has in all places existed the same "enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman^e," and the same opposition betwixt "light and darkness, Christ and Belial^f."]

Nor is it less true at the present hour—

[The person "who departeth from evil maketh himself a prey" to all around him, and becomes, as it were, a *legitimate* object for every one to pursue with whatever degree of malignity he may see fit. There is no other member of society, of a decent character, that is so universally hated and contemned. Every other person, if he do amiss, has some one to extenuate his fault: and, if he be treated, either in word or deed, with an undue measure of severity, he will have some to resent the injury, and to vindicate his cause. But let a godly man be reviled, let his very motives have sentence passed upon them, let him be stigmatized with the most opprobrious names, and who will take his part? Who will vindicate his character? who will shew resentment on his account? If even a word of palliation be spoken in his behalf, it will be almost a miracle: but a real friend, who feels for him, who enters into his cause, who espouses his interests, he will not find in the whole world, unless it be one who is under the same condemnation with himself. As it is said of our blessed Lord, "His manner of

^c Ps. xxxviii. 20.

^e Gen. iii. 15.

^d Isai. xlix. 7.

^f 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.

life who would declare^g?" so may it be said of all his followers: their accusers are bold enough: but their defenders are not to be found, even in the seasons of their greatest need.

Nor is it to one description of persons only that the godly are obnoxious: the rich and the poor, the moral and the immoral, are penetrated with the same feelings towards them, and manifest their hatred in the same unblushing manner. Were Paul and Barnabas to be expelled from Antioch? no more willing instruments could be found than some "devout and honourable women^h." Have Paul and Silas provoked the envy of the Jews at Thessalonica? there are plenty of "lewd fellows of the baser sort" ready to execute whatever their superiors may wish, and to drive these holy men from the place; uproar and tumult being deemed the best answers to arguments which could not be controverted by rational discourseⁱ. Only let Pilate and the chief priests pass sentence against Christ, and there will be no want of common people to spit in his face, and crucify him. David, though so great and good a man, complains that all orders of men were actuated by the same malignant dispositions towards him: "the fat bulls of Bashan beset him, whilst dogs also compassed him round about^k;" yea, "the very abjects gathered themselves together against him, and hypocritical mockers gnashed upon him with their teeth^l." That there are times and seasons of comparative peace to the Church we readily acknowledge: there were such seasons even in the primitive Church^m. And we also thankfully acknowledge, that even where the same disapprobation of vital godliness exists, it does not manifest itself with the same degree of bitterness in all persons; the natural enmity of the heart being moderated by sentiments of liberality and candour. But we will still say, that it does exist in the heart of every unconverted man, and that "they who are born after the flesh, will, though not in all cases with the same rancour, persecute those who are born after the Spirit:" as it was formerly, "so it is nowⁿ;" and so it ever will be, as long as an unconverted man shall exist upon the face of the earth.]

Having established this fact, I now come,

II. To account for it—

Certainly one should rather have expected, that every one departing from evil, would be an object, not of hatred and censure, but of approbation and applause. We are constrained however to acknow-

^g Isai. liii. 8.

^k Ps. xxii. 12, 16.

ⁿ Gal. iv. 29.

^h Acts xvii. 3, 4.

^l Ps. xxxv. 15, 16.

ⁱ Acts xiii. 50.

^m Acts ix. 31.

ledge, that this is not the case; but that, on the contrary, the person who takes this step will infallibly "make himself a prey." And whence arises this? It is chiefly owing to these two things, namely, that, in departing from evil,

1. He irritates and incenses Satan—

[Satan is "the strong man armed, who delighteth to keep his goods in peace^o." As being "the god of this world^p," he would have all his votaries obedient. But when one of his subjects revolts from him, and casts off his yoke, he instantly exerts himself to bring him back to his former state of vassalage and sin. For this end he puts in motion all his forces, both of men and devils, unnumbered myriads of whom he has at his command. Every species of device he uses, to accomplish his malignant ends. If he judges persuasion to be the most likely means of attaining his object, he will find some friend or relative to whisper in our ear, "Friend, spare thyself." This, though in an Apostle, was the devil's work^q; for, as he can transform himself into an angel of light, so can he make his ministers assume the garb of piety, and appear like ministers of righteousness^r. On the other hand, does he judge that open violence will be more conducive to his end? he will soon find a Judas to betray us, a Pilate to condemn us, a populace to crucify us. *That*, in the instance of our blessed Lord, was all accomplished by him; for it was "his hour, and the power of darkness^s." And, as then, so still, "he worketh in all the children of disobedience," and employs them in every possible way to maintain and extend his empire in the world^t.

This then, in part, accounts for the fact which we have before stated. If there be a deserter from a camp, no effort is left unattempted to bring him back to the standard which he has left: and much more may we expect that one so jealous of his power as Satan is, will exert himself to the uttermost, both by fraud and violence, to reduce to bondage those who have escaped from his dominion.]

2. He reproves and condemns the world—

[It is said of Noah, that, in building an ark for the saving of his house, "he condemned the world^u;" and in like manner all who depart from evil condemn those who continue in the way which they forsake. The very act of forsaking them is a practical condemnation of them. But *this* the world will not endure: for they feel themselves reduced to the alternative, of

^o Luke xi. 21.

^p 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^q Matt. xvi. 22, 23.

^r 2 Cor. xi. 13—15.

^s John xiii. 27. Luke xxii. 53.

^t Eph. ii. 2.

^u Heb. xi. 7.

either condemning us, or acknowledging the folly of their own ways. This latter they do not choose to do: and therefore, in self-defence, as it were, they adopt the former, and load us with obloquy on account of our needless, or hypocritical preciseness. They will pretend indeed to cast the blame on our *principles*: but it is with the *practice* that they in reality are offended. If we would but conform to *their* habits, we might hold whatever principles we pleased, and no man would find fault with us: but if we venture to turn out of the broad road, and to walk in the narrow path which the Scriptures have marked out, we shall be sure enough to be comprehended under some sweeping term of reproach, which, whilst it purports to attack our principles, involves in indiscriminate censure all, however opposite their principles, provided only they agree in their practice. That this is the true ground of their enmity, appears from what our blessed Lord has said respecting the treatment shewn to him: "The world," says he to his disciples, whose light was obscured by their proximity to him, "the world cannot hate you: but me it hateth, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil^x." So in whatever place we bear our testimony, the people who hate the light will wish to get rid of us, and will, in heart, if not in express terms, say to us as Amaziah did to Amos, "O thou seer, go, flee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there; but prophesy not again any more at Bethel," to molest and trouble us^y.]

That this subject may be brought more home to our own bosoms, permit me to ADDRESS,

1. Those who through the fear of man are induced to continue in evil—

[It is certain that many, where the Gospel is preached with fidelity, are led into clearer views of their duty, than they can prevail upon themselves to carry into effect: they are kept back by "the fear of man, which bringeth a snare." But let me ask, What is there that man can do, in comparison of what God *will* do, if we violate our conscience, and prove "rebellious against the light" which he has given us^z? Hear the kind and tender admonition of our Lord: "I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: but fear Him, who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell: yea, I say unto you, Fear Him^a." Think with yourselves, not only what a folly it is to fear man rather than God, but what base ingratitude

^x John vii. 7.

^y Amos vii. 12, 13.

^z Job xxiv. 13.

^a Luke xii. 4, 5.

it is to the Saviour, who came down from heaven for you, and died upon the cross for you, and bore all the curses of God's broken law for you. Did he then, for the joy that was set before him of saving your souls, endure the cross and despise the shame; and will you bear no cross, and encounter no shame for him? Should you not rather rejoice if you are counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake? Blush then for your ingratitude, and take up your cross, and glory in it, and "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach^b."]

2. Those who are called to suffer for righteousness' sake—

[Shall I lament for you? No indeed; but rather congratulate you on the honour conferred upon you. How remarkable is that declaration of the Apostle to the Philippian Church! "To you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake^c." Here he represents your sufferings as a gift from God; a gift of a most valuable kind bestowed upon you purely for Christ's sake; a gift greater far than faith itself: for if by faith you are *saved*, by sufferings you have your *weight of glory augmented* to an indefinite extent. Search the Scriptures throughout, and you will find but one testimony on this head: you are invariably taught to regard your sufferings, whatever they may be, as a ground of joy^d: you are told to "rejoice and leap for joy, seeing that your reward in heaven will be proportionably great^e." See then that ye faint not, either at the continuance or increase of your trials: but "be faithful unto death; and God will give you a crown of life." Let your great concern be, to depart more and more from what is evil, and to abound more and more in that which is good: so shall you enjoy the testimony of a good conscience here, and receive the plaudit of your Judge in the realms of bliss.]

^b Heb. xiii. 13. ^c Phil. i. 29. ^d Jam. i. 2. and v. 11.

^e Matt. v. 12. and 1 Pet. iv. 12—14.

DCCCCXCVII.

THE MEANS OF SPIRITUAL VICTORY.

Isai. lix. 19. *When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.*

THAT there will be a time when all the nations of the earth shall be converted unto God, is attested by every part of Holy Writ. But the seasons of great awakenings in the Church have always been seasons

of violent opposition from the great adversary of God and man: and while there remain any ungodly persons to act as his instruments, he will not fail to make use of them, in obstructing to the uttermost the progress of true religion. It is matter of consolation however, that the more strenuous his exertions are, the more will God himself put forth his power to maintain and advance his work: and we are well assured, that, “when he worketh none shall hinder.” That the passage before us refers to the Millennial period is certain; because St. Paul cites it in that very view^a. The words of the text indeed are somewhat differently translated by some, who apply the whole of it to God exerting himself “like a river straitened in its course, which a strong wind driveth along^b.” But in our translation there is a very important idea suggested, from which there is no need to depart. It leads us to consider,

I. In what way the great adversary of souls assaults the Church—

Never for one moment does Satan relax his vigilance, or feel any intermission of his enmity against the people of God. But there are particular seasons when his efforts are more violent, and when he may be said to “come in like a flood.” In the manner of his assaults indeed he is continually changing; but his object is invariably the same. He seeks to overwhelm the Church,

1. By errors—

[In this way he has often prevailed to an astonishing extent. Even in the apostolic age he had many active emissaries, whom he sent forth to disseminate error, and by whom he “subverted whole houses^c.” It is scarcely credible to what a degree he “blinded the minds” of men in later ages, by the superstitions of Popery; and with what rapidity he established the heresies of Pelagius, Arius, and Socinus. But we need not go back to former times: for we have witnessed in our own days the spread of infidelity like a deluge: we have seen a whole country, under the idea of superior illumination, setting

^a Compare ver. 20. with Rom. xi. 26.

^b Bishop Lowth.

^c Tit. i. 11.

up a false philosophy in the place of true religion, and establishing the worship of Reason on the ruins of Christianity.

If we of this nation have been preserved in a measure from the general contagion, still the errors that obtain amongst us are as general and fatal as any that were ever propagated in the world. The fundamentals of Christianity are kept out of sight: the doctrines of original sin, of salvation by faith, and of the operations of the Holy Spirit, are either wholly exploded, or received only in such a way as to reduce them to barren sentiments, devoid of efficacy on the soul — Nor are the professors of godliness freed from the baneful influence of error. There are not wanting some who turn the grace of God into licentiousness, and boast that they are freed from the law, not as a covenant only, but as a rule of life. This is but too pleasing to corrupt nature: no wonder therefore that such teachers draw away disciples after them, and that they cause many to make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.]

2. By iniquity—

[At all times there will be found much impiety and profaneness in the world. But when a governor, or a professor of religion, lends himself to the propagation of wickedness, it will, like an impetuous torrent, bear down all before it, and inundate the land. Jeroboam no sooner enjoined the dereliction of God and his worship, and set up calves in Dan and Bethel, than all the ten tribes “willingly ran after his commandment^d,” and Peter no sooner sanctioned a cowardly shunning of the cross, than all the Church, not excepting Barnabas himself, were drawn away by his dissimulation^e. Indeed this is the natural effect of sin: wherever “iniquity abounds, the love of many will wax cold.” The difficulty of maintaining one’s steadfastness must of necessity be much increased by a general prevalence of sin. How hard must Noah have found it to preserve himself unspotted in the midst of the antediluvian world; and Lot in Sodom; and Micaiah or Elijah in Israel^f! We are, alas! far more ready to follow a multitude in doing evil, than to put them to shame by a holy conversation; more ready to “put our light under a bushel,” than to expose it to the blasts which threaten to extinguish it. Well has our Lord said, “Woe unto the world because of offences.”]

3. By persecution—

[This was the engine which Satan used from the beginning: he instigated the first-born of man to murder his own brother, for no other crime than his superior sanctity^g. What

^d Hos. v. 11.

^e Gal. ii. 12, 13.

^f 1 Kings xix. 10. and xxii. 6, 13.

^g 1 John iii. 12.

effects were made in succeeding ages by Pharaoh to destroy the people of the Lord, is well known. The Prophets, the Apostles, and our Lord himself, were almost without exception persecuted unto death. The Christian Church, from the first moment of its establishment to this present hour, has experienced the truth of that assertion, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution^h." And how many have been cast down by it! How many "bright stars have been swept away by the dragon's tail!" St. Paul, when arraigned before Nero as a criminal, was left alone: all his followers forsook him; and he was left without any other countenance or support than what he received from the Lord himself^k. Thus in every age, "those who have not had root in themselves, have endured but for a while, and in the time of persecution have fallen away^l."]]

4. Temptation—

[Many who have withstood all other assaults, have fallen at last through the fiery darts of temptation. If we find here and there a Joseph or a Daniel who is enabled to defeat his enemy, we see multitudes who, like David or Peter, are as beacons to us, and as monuments of human weakness. By the means that have been before mentioned, Satan assaults the Church at large; by temptations he attacks the individuals in particular. And who has passed this ordeal unhurt? who has combated without a wound? Happy for us, if we have not been utterly cast down, and left to rise no more!]

But that we may not be discouraged, let us consider,

II. In what way the Spirit of God withstands him—

"Our help is indeed laid upon One that is mighty." The Lord of Hosts himself stands forth for our help: he erects his standard; and calls us to fight under it. He effectually defeats the attempts of our great adversary,

1. By the preaching of his Gospel—

[With this apparently weak and inefficient weapon does he go forth to smite down his enemies, and subdue them to the obedience of faith. It is justly called "the rod of his strength." See what God wrought in one single hour by this sword in the hand of a poor fisherman: he reached the inmost souls of three thousand rebels, and rescued them out of the

^h See ver. 15. middle clause.

^k 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.

^l Rev. xii. 4.

^l Matt. xiii. 21.

hands of their inveterate foe. Wherever the doctrine of the cross was exhibited, it proved "mighty through God to the pulling down of the strong holds" of sin and Satan: and at this moment, though delivered in much weakness, it is "the power of God to the salvation of many souls" — — —]

2. By the dealings of his providence—

[The dispensations of Providence, whether pleasing or afflictive, are all ordered for this end. His "goodness is intended to lead us to repentance;" and the day of adversity to bring us to consideration. Astonishing were his interpositions in Egypt, and at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, for the purpose of preserving his Church and people. And if we were more observant of the various occurrences of life, we should often see that his hand hath wrought gloriously on our behalf. As David, when almost surrounded by Saul's army, was rescued by the diversion caused by the invading army of the Philistines^m, so have we experienced, on many occasions, God's seasonable interposition for "the deliverance of our soulsⁿ." "Whoso is wise, will observe these things; and he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord^o."]]

3. By the influence of his grace—

[All other means, if unaccompanied with a divine agency on the soul, are of no effect: the richest mercies or the heaviest judgments serve only to harden the heart, and sear the conscience. The Gospel itself is rather "a savour of death unto death, than of life unto life," if it "come not to us in power and in the Holy Ghost." But the most trivial event shall impress the mind, and the most cursory observation pierce like a barbed arrow, when directed by God "through the joints of the harness:" it is then "sharper than any two-edged sword, and pierces to the dividing asunder the soul and spirit, the joints and marrow" — — —]

This subject naturally suggests to us the IMPROVEMENT suited to it. Hear then a word,

1. Of warning—

[We may not have experienced, or strongly noticed, the assaults of Satan: but let us not therefore imagine that he is regardless of us: he is only watching his opportunity to strike with more effect. When he was defeated by our Lord, he retired; but it was only "for a season." In the garden of Gethsemane he redoubled his malignant efforts: and sooner or later he will make his assaults on us, however eminent we

^m 1 Sam. xxiii. 26—28.

ⁿ See Zech. i. 18—21. and Rev. xii. 15, 16. ^o Ps. cvii. 43.

may be, or however careful to give him no advantage against us. Let us then "watch and be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation." Let us "resist the devil; and he shall flee from us."]

2. Of direction—

[In the warfare which you are called to maintain with this great adversary, think not to resist him in your own strength. Your strength is perfect weakness. Unsupported by your God, you will be crushed before the moth. You have not in yourselves a sufficiency for the smallest thing; much less to vanquish this "roaring lion." Lean not then either to your own understanding, or to an arm of flesh: but let your trust be in God, who made heaven and earth.]

3. Of encouragement—

[However numerous or potent your enemies may be, there are more for you, than against you^p: "God has given you a banner^q;" yea, he himself is your banner^r. Under him you shall conquer; yea, you shall be "more than conquerors through Him that loved you." Your extremity shall be the very season of his effectual interposition: "In the mount the Lord shall be seen." "Fear not then; for though thou art only a worm, thou shalt thresh the mountains." Even now may you triumph, in full assurance of victory. You may challenge all your enemies, and, like David, already pronounce Goliath's doom^s. "Be strong then in the Lord, and in the power of his might," and you shall soon put your feet upon the necks of your vanquished enemies.]

^p See Ps. xciii. 3, 4.

^q Ps. lx. 4.

^r Exod. xvii. 15.

^s See Ps. cxviii. 6—12.

DCCCCXCVIII.

THE PERPETUITY OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

Isai. lix. 20, 21. *The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.*

THE manner in which the most glorious prophecies are introduced, is such as most effectually to display the sovereignty and goodness of God in the

bestowment of the promised blessings. It will be generally found, that the sinfulness or misery of Israel is first set forth, with a considerable measure of enlargement, and then, for the most part, in an abrupt way; and, when nothing but a denunciation of wrath might reasonably be expected, a blessed promise is given, that a Redeemer shall be sent, to deliver Israel from all their guilt and from all their misery. It is thus that the prophecy before us is introduced. In the whole preceding part of the chapter, the prophet expatiates upon the extreme wickedness of Israel, which the people themselves are constrained to acknowledge^a. Then he expresses the astonishment of Jehovah himself, that, amongst all the people, there should be found none to intercede with him in their behalf^b; together with his determination to arm himself in their behalf, and, by the exertion of his own Almighty arm, to gain for them the victory over all their enemies^c. Then comes an explicit promise of a “Redeemer,” who should not only establish his kingdom among them, but perpetuate his dominion over them to the remotest ages^d. And here it is observable, that the temporal deliverance, which is generally used to shadow forth the blessings of the Gospel salvation, is lost sight of, and nothing is brought forward but what is completely and exclusively of spiritual import. The words before us declare, in very striking terms,

I. The establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom—

The Messiah is promised under the character of a “Redeemer”—

[To Cyrus and the Babylonish captivity there can be no proper reference; because the redemption from Babylon was vouchsafed indiscriminately to all: whereas the redemption here spoken of, is limited to those only who turn from their transgressions in Jacob. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who is here spoken of: and the prophecy declares,]

1. His advent in the flesh, to redeem the world—

[Yes; from heaven he comes, even from the bosom of the Father, to redeem mankind, both *by price* and *by power* :

^a ver. 2—15.

^b ver. 16.

^c ver. 17—19.

^d ver. 20, 21.

by price, even his own most precious blood, from the guilt of all their sins; and by the power of his Almighty grace to deliver them from its dominion — — — Yet it is “to those only who turn from their transgressions” that he comes with effect: it is to save men *from* their sins, not *in* them, that he is sent: and it is in reference to that very circumstance that the name Jesus, or Joshua, or Jah Osea, divine Saviour, is given him^e. But wherever he sees one who is willing to be delivered from transgression, he will work effectually in his behalf: he will suffer no enemy to lead him captive: he will come to him as the angel did to Peter in prison; and will cause his chains to fall off, and the prison doors to open before him; and will thus bring him forth to light and liberty. He did this, in numberless instances, at the first establishment of his kingdom upon earth; and he has been doing it to the present hour: nor have all the powers of darkness been able to withstand him.]

2. His future advent, to unite in one glorious Church the whole world, both of Jews and Gentiles—

[Of the conversion of the Gentiles the prophet speaks in the words before the text: “They shall fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun.” And of the restoration of the Jews he speaks in the text itself. Of this we have no doubt: for the Apostle Paul, arguing expressly upon the subject of their future restoration, and shewing that it is not only possible but certain, adduces this very passage in proof of his assertions: “All Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob^f.” By a close comparison of the text with the words as cited by the Apostle, there will appear some remarkable points of difference: but they are such as may be easily accounted for, and such as have a remarkable propriety in them. The prophet says, “The Redeemer shall come *to* Zion, and *to them that turn* from transgression in Jacob.” The Apostle says, “He shall come *out of* Zion, *to turn away* ungodliness from Jacob.” The Redeemer, in coming to the Jewish Church, has already come *to* Zion: and when he shall hereafter convert the Jews to the faith, he will come *out of* the Christian Church for that purpose. Moreover, when he first came, it was to take out from amongst the Jewish people *those who were willing* to embrace him, and *to turn* from their transgressions: but when he shall come at a future period, it will be *to make them willing*; and, by the all-powerful operation of his grace, *to turn them* from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” It would be sufficient to account for the difference,

^e Matt. i. 21.

^f Rom. xi. 26.

by saying, that the Apostle, as was customary with him, quoted from the Septuagint Translation : but when there was such a distinction observable between the former and the latter advent of the Redeemer, the adoption of the translation was peculiarly proper.

But, to the point—The Redeemer shall come again to convert and save God's ancient people, the Jews. As surely as ever he came to them in the flesh previous to their dispersion, he shall come to them by his word and Spirit, to restore them from their dispersion, and to gather them into his Church, that they may again be a holy people unto the Lord. And, however deeply rooted they may appear to be in their prejudices and their sins, he will prevail over them, and unite them with the Gentiles in one great and universal Church, to be unto their God "a praise, and an honour, and a glory," to all eternity.]

In addition to the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom, the prophet announces to us,

II. Its perpetuity—

God, from the first establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom to the present hour, has accompanied his word by the mighty operations of his Spirit—

[On the day of Pentecost this was manifest : for, not by the exercise of miraculous powers only did the Spirit appear, but by the conversion of a multitude of souls to Christ. On all other occasions, too, the mighty working of the Spirit was seen, whenever the Apostles preached; and their "word was made quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword." So to the present hour has the same divine energy accompanied the word, wherever it has been preached in sincerity and truth. Thousands of living witnesses can attest, that they have themselves been enlightened, quickened, comforted by the word, through its having "come to them, not in word only," but "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Yes: to this hour is the word "preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven;" not indeed in his miraculous powers, but in spiritual agency, which nothing can withstand.]

By the same Almighty power shall the word be accompanied to the end of time—

[This is "God's covenant with his people." Never shall the preaching of the word cease; nor shall the mighty working of the Spirit ever cease to operate by means of it. The Jews do indeed, at present, withstand the word: as all of *us* also do, until the Spirit comes to make the word effectual. But this is only until the appointed period shall arrive for the

Redeemer to extend his kingdom over the face of the earth. Then shall Pentecostal scenes be renewed throughout the world; then "shall a nation be born in a day;" then shall the whole Jewish people "look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn;" and "the two sticks of Israel and of Judah become one," "never to be separated any more^g. The perpetuity of Christ's dominion over them, *through the continued agency of his Spirit*, is thus stated by the Prophet Ezekiel: "Thus saith the Lord God; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon *the whole house of Israel*, and will be jealous for my holy name; after that they have borne their shame, and all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their land, and none made them afraid. When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. *Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel*, saith the Lord God^h."]

APPLICATION—

Consider now this prophecy,

1. As a personal matter to your own souls—

[To *you* is this Redeemer come, even to apply to *your* souls all the blessings of redemption. Whatever you need, you will find it all in him, and you shall receive it out of his fulness. But, in truth, the root and summit of all blessings is, *deliverance from sin*: without this, heaven itself would be no source of joy; nor would the work of Christ be of any real value. Hear the testimony of the Apostle Peter, at the very first establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom: "Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquitiesⁱ." *This* is the blessing which Christianity brings to *you*; yes, to *every one* of you. Look back, and see what are the sins which have formerly led you captive. You once cherished them as conducive to your happiness: but far greater happiness awaits you in your deliverance from them. Find your besetting sins: lay your hand upon them: carry them to the Lord: entreat him to wash them away by his own most precious blood. Entreat, too, the aid of his good Spirit. Beg that, whilst his word points out and condemns sin, his Holy Spirit may make

^g Ezek. xxxvii. 15—22.

^h Ezek. xxxix. 25—29.

ⁱ Acts iii. 26.

that "word like fire, or like a hammer, that breaketh the rock in pieces." Once sanctified by the word and Spirit of God, you will know the full blessings of redemption: they will flow into your souls like a river, and be an earnest of your blessedness in the eternal world.]

2. As a public concern, to the whole world—

[The Redeemer *is* come: his kingdom *is* established: his word and Spirit *do* evince an almighty energy, which nothing can withstand. Shall any one then despond, in relation either to Jews or Gentiles? Wait but a little, and it shall be seen "whether God's word shall stand or not." Look to the rising, or the setting sun: to the furthest extent of either shall "God's glory shine," and the Redeemer's kingdom be established. Shall it be thought that the obduracy of the Jews, or the superstition of the Gentiles, shall oppose any effectual bar to the Gospel? Before the Sun of Righteousness they shall vanish, like the morning dew; and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." When we think of the impotency of man, and feel discouragement from that, we forget that God has promised to accompany the word with his Holy Spirit: for, if "the Spirit be poured out from on high," who is he that shall stand before him? Go to the valley of Ezekiel's vision: see it "full of bones, dry, very dry:" at the breathing of the Spirit upon them, the word is effectual to raise them into life, a whole army^k. So shall God's word be in the mouths of those who shall go forth at the millennial period: "it shall be mighty, through God, to the pulling down of all the strongholds" of sin and Satan, and to "the subduing of the whole world to the obedience of faith." Whether that period be yet fully come, we doubt; but that it is near at hand, we have no doubt. Let your faith, then, in this prophecy be strong: and your desire after this blessed period be ardent; and your efforts to hasten it forward, be energetic. Then may we hope that the Gospel, which has hitherto been confined within such narrow limits, will "run and be glorified," and that all "the kingdoms of the world will speedily become the kingdom of the Lord and his Christ."]

^k Ezek. xxxvii. 10.

DCCCCXCIX.

OUR DUTY ARISING FROM THE ADVENT OF CHRIST.

Isai. lx. 1.—*Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.*

THE prophetic style is wonderfully sublime: its figures are so bold, its transitions so quick, its descrip-

tions so animated, that all the most admired compositions of Greece and Rome sink in our estimation when compared with the sacred oracles. The writings of Isaiah in particular justify this remark; and both the chapter, and the very words, before us, are worthy of notice in this view. The prophet had just foretold the advent of the Redeemer^a; and instantly, passing over an interval of seven or eight hundred years, he sees his prediction, as it were, accomplished; and calls upon the Church, in terms of joyful congratulation, to approve itself worthy of so great a blessing—

In discoursing on his words we shall consider,

I. The tidings here announced—

Christ is the fountain of light to the whole universe—

[He is “the LORD” JEHOVAH, “in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead.” Though as the Son of man, he laboured under all the sinless infirmities of our nature; yet, as the Son of God, he was “the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person.” From him proceeds a lustre, as from the sun in the firmament; but though “he shines in the darkness, the darkness does not apprehend his light^b.” It is the Church alone that truly receives him. *That*, like Goshen in the midst of Egypt, is light, whilst all around it is in gross darkness^c. If any have the light of his word, they cannot profit by it, unless their eyes be opened by his good Spirit. Hence the prophet, speaking of him to the Church, says emphatically, “*Thy* light is come.”]

This light is risen upon the Church of God—

[Under the Jewish dispensation “the day began, as it were, to dawn; and in the hearts of some the day-star had arisen^d.” But at the incarnation of Christ, and in the days of his ministration upon earth, the sun arose above the horizon. In the apostolic age it shone in its meridian splendour; and, through the goodness of God, it has at last visited these distant regions^e. In some respects it shines clearer upon us than even on the Apostles themselves; since they, for several years after

^a Isai. lix. 20. That the passage refers to Christ, and not merely to the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, will be seen by comparing Isai. ix. 2. with Matt. iv. 16.

^b John i. 5.

^c Exod. ix. 26. and x. 21—23.

^d 2 Pet. i. 19.

^e Mal. iv. 2. Luke i. 78, 79.

our Lord's ascension, did not see that the partition-wall between Jews and Gentiles was to be broken down: whereas we, who are Gentiles, not only know this truth, but are "grafted on that stock, from which the Jews themselves have been broken off."]

These tidings are indeed joyful: but, that they are to have a practical effect upon us, we see by,

II. The exhortation grounded upon them—

In the margin of our Bibles the word "shine" is translated "be enlightened." This translation suggests so important a thought, a thought so naturally arising from the tidings announced, that we may well give it a distinguished place in this part of our subject. The exhortation may then be considered as two-fold;

1. "Arise, and be enlightened"—

[Notwithstanding "the true light now shines," the greater part even of the Christian world are covered with gross darkness^f. We set before them the light, but they "love darkness rather than light," and desire that we would "make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before them^g." But we should come forth from our dungeons, and behold the Sun of Righteousness^h. We should beg of God to bring us "out of darkness into his marvellous lightⁱ," and to "shine into our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ^k." If we continue blind it is our own fault: we take part with Satan against Christ, and, as the recompense of our wickedness, "the god of this world is permitted to blind us^l," and we are given over to a delusion to believe a lie^m. Since then "the day-spring from on high hath visited us," let us no longer "sit in darkness and the shadow of death," but improve the mercies we enjoy, that "our feet may be guided into the way of peace."]

2. "Arise, and shine"—

[The sun in the firmament irradiates the stars, which shine with a lustre derived from him. Thus we are also to "shine as lights in the worldⁿ," and, to reflect the light of the Sun of Righteousness. As the face of Moses, when come down from the mount, shone, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold him^o, so should all of us, though with a less dazzling lustre, shine in our proper orbit. The

^f ver. 2. ^g John iii. 19. Isai. xxx. 11. ^h Isai. xlix. 9.

ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 9. ^k 2 Cor. iv. 6. ^l 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^m 2 Thess. ii. 11. ⁿ Phil. ii. 15. ^o 2 Cor. iii. 13.

stars indeed can shine only when the sun is withdrawn; but the brighter the Lord Jesus shines, the more shall we reflect his image. Let us then “walk in the light as God is in the light^p,” and let “our path be as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day^q.]”

ADDRESS—

1. Those who, though living in the midst of the light, have never yet seen it—

[Such are without excuse. God would “make the scales to fall from our eyes,” if we would but call upon him. But our rejection of the light will be the occasion of our more aggravated condemnation. “If Christ had not come and spoken unto us we had not had sin; but now we have no cloak for our sin^r.” Let us then cry to him, like those of old, “Lord, open my eyes.” Then shall we no longer walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life^s.]

2. Those who, though they have had some views of Christ, are yet in darkness—

[The sun in the heavens is sometimes obscured by intervening clouds: thus also “the Sun of Righteousness” is sometimes veiled; and we are left to walk many days without any cheering views of his countenance. If this be the case with us, let us tarry his leisure, and wait patiently for his return. Let us not say, “My sun is set to rise no more;” but rather, “When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light unto me^t.” Thus in his light you shall see light^u; “the light that is sown for you shall in due time spring up^x,” yea, your light shall rise in obscurity, and your darkness be as the noon-day^y.]

3. Those who are enjoying the light of the Redeemer’s countenance—

[Jesus is the light and glory, not of the church militant only, but also of the church triumphant^z: and to “behold his glory as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father^a” is an anticipation and foretaste of heaven itself. “In his favour is life; and his loving-kindness is better than life itself.” Let the enjoyment then of so rich a mercy stir you up to glorify his name; that so, while you behold his glory, you yourselves may be changed into his image from glory to glory^b, and, by making your light to shine before men, may stir up others to glorify him also^c.]

^p 1 John i. 7.

^q Prov. iv. 18.

^r John ix. 41. and xv. 22.

^s John viii. 12. Eph. v. 14.

^t Mic. vii. 7—9.

^u Ps. xxxvi. 9.

^x Ps. xcvii. 11.

^y Isai. lviii. 10.

^z Rev. xxi. 23, 24.

^a John i. 14.

^b 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^c Matt. v. 16.

M.

MILLENNIAL PIETY DESCRIBED.

Isai. lx. 8.—*Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?*

THERE is much spoken in the Holy Scriptures respecting the glory of the latter day. This whole chapter is occupied with the subject. The predictions contained in it have never yet been verified. Great as was the spread of the Gospel in the apostolic age, it was nothing in comparison of that to which we are taught to look forward at a period that is now fast approaching. The prophet, whilst occupied in the contemplation of that day, saw it, as it were, already commenced, and the whole Gentile world flocking to Christ, even as doves to their windows. The language in which he depicts that day is suited to the time at which he wrote. Jerusalem was then the centre of union to all the tribes. Thither all the males went up thrice a year: there the sacrifices were offered: and thither all Gentile proselytes also came to present their offerings to the Lord. But all these things were typical of the Christian Church, which shall be established on the face of the whole earth, and of the spiritual sacrifices which all who come up to our Zion shall offer there.

I propose to consider our text,

I. In reference to the millennial period—

The question is evidently the language of surprise and joy: and the answer to it is given in the whole context. Let us attend to,

1. The prophet's own description of that day—

[Then shall light burst forth, almost as at the first creation, when “God said, Let there be light; and there was light.” The gross darkness which at present covers the whole earth will be dispelled by the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, and “all flesh will see the salvation of God^a.” “The Gentiles, from one end of the earth even to the other, will

^a Luke iii. 6.

then come to Zion's light, and kings to the brightness of her rising:" and with them they will bring whatsoever they have whereby they may glorify their God; their whole land, as it were, being covered with their retinue. "The multitude of camels shall cover thee," says the Lord, "the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah: all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense: and they shall shew forth the praises of the Lord^b." The very cattle shall feel, as it were, impressed with a holy zeal to honour God, and come up voluntarily, ambitious of the honour of being offered in sacrifice upon his altar: "All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee; the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar; and I will glorify the house of my glory^c." All this Jehovah revealed to the prophet, and made to pass, as it were, before his eyes; assuring him, that the isles of western Europe should take the lead in this glorious work: "Surely *the isles* shall wait for me, and *the ships of Tarshish first*, (O that our happy isle might have this distinguished honour, and employ her shipping in this glorious cause!) to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the Lord thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee^d."

And in what manner shall this event take place? Shall it resemble any thing that has ever yet existed in the world? No: it will infinitely surpass any thing that occurred even in the apostolic age. Then indeed there was one day, the day of Pentecost, when God's power was revealed, and three thousand were converted to the faith of Christ: but at the period to which we are looking forward, "a *nation* will be born in a day^e." A Pentecostal effusion of the Spirit will be a daily occurrence; and not in one place only, but in every part of the globe: so that the converts will come "flying" in inconceivable numbers, "like a cloud," and with the ardour and celerity of "doves flying to their windows."

Certainly this description of the Millennium is highly figurative: yet we conceive it to be fully justified by,]

2. The testimony of other prophets respecting it—

[All the prophets, with more or less clearness, testify of this day. David speaks very fully and strongly respecting it. He tells us, "that the utmost ends of the earth are given to Christ for his possession^f;" that "all kings shall fall down before him," and "all nations shall serve him^g;" and that "the whole earth shall be filled with his glory^h." The prophet

^b ver. 2—6.

^c ver. 7.

^d ver. 9.

^e ver. 22. with lxvi. 8.

^f Ps. ii. 8.

^g Ps. lxxii. 11.

^h Ps. lxxii. 19.

Daniel repeatedly declares, that “the stone which has been cut out without hands shall break in pieces all the kingdoms of the earth, and become a great mountain, and fill the whole earth,” and “stand for everⁱ,” and that “all people, nations, and languages, shall serve” our adorable Redeemer; and that “his dominion should never pass away^k.” Habakkuk assures us, that “the knowledge of the Lord shall in that day cover the earth, as deeply and extensively as the waters cover the sea^l.” Zechariah also, who delights to dwell on this glorious subject, asserts, that “the Lord shall be King over all the earth; that in that day there shall be one Lord, and his name one:” and that “from that time there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts^m.” Thus, without multiplying passages to the same effect, we see, beyond a doubt, that a blessed season is approaching, when God will, as it were, “create all things newⁿ,” and there shall be “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness^o.”]

It will not be unprofitable to consider our text,

II. In reference to the present time—

But here we must notice it rather *with regret*—

[Though so many centuries have elapsed since the delivery of this prophecy, we are, though not in time, yet in appearance, almost as far as ever from its accomplishment. There is not one sixth of the human race that have ever so much as heard of the Lord Jesus Christ; and of those who are called by his name, the great mass are as far from any spiritual knowledge of him as the heathen themselves. Look through Europe, or through our own highly-favoured kingdom, or even through our own immediate neighbourhood, and say, Whether you see, or hear of, any thing resembling the description in our text? Where do we find that ardent desire after God; that flocking of multitudes to Mount Zion; that surrender of themselves to God as living sacrifices; that determination to lose no time, but to press forward with increasing ardour, till they have found their rest in Christ? Here and there an individual may be found that is inquiring the way to Zion: but what appearance is there of a cloud, borne forward by the breath of the Almighty; or of a flock winging their way to Zion, with a zeal that regards no obstacle, and a rapidity that suffers no delay? I may rather ask, Where is the place in which the great mass of the inhabitants would not regard such zeal as an enthusiasm that was to be repressed, rather than as a piety

ⁱ Dan. ii. 34, 35, 44.

^k Dan. vii. 14.

^l Hab. ii. 14.

^m Zech. xiv. 9, 21.

ⁿ Isai. lxv. 17.

^o 2 Pet. iii. 13.

deserving imitation? Instead therefore of saying, Who are *these*? we must rather say, "Where are there *any*, who fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?" If *some* there be; still, in comparison of the bulk of nominal Christians, they are but as "the gleanings of the olive, two or three upon the topmost bough."]

Yet we may also in some degree notice it *with joy*—

[I bless God, there are *some*, and some also in this place, who do seek their rest in Christ, and do fly towards it with unabated ardour. Yes, and with surprise also, as well as joy, may I ask, "Who are these?" They were once as far off from God as the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah, and as unlikely to devote themselves to God as the flocks of Kedar, or the rams of Nebaioth. Their education, their age, their associates, their habits, all rendered such a change highly improbable; and give us a decisive evidence, that He who has wrought so effectually in them, can accomplish the same blessed change over the face of the whole earth. We therefore do rejoice, both for the individuals whose zeal is so kindled, and for those who are provoked to emulation by the example that is set before them. And we pray God that their numbers may be increased a thousand-fold; and that in this place, as well as in the world at large, "a little one may become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. May the Lord hasten it in his time!"]

APPLICATION—

1. To those who have begun their flight—

[Let me say, Suffer nothing to retard you, nothing to divert you from your purpose. If, instead of having a cloud, or a flock, to accompany you, you are but a solitary individual, let not that discourage you. Your object is not less praiseworthy on that account. Lot was not the less right in maintaining his love for piety, because all around him were confederate in evil courses; nor was Noah the less approved of God, because the whole world agreed in loading him with derision. If many will join you, be thankful for it: but, if there be not another in all the cities of the world that will flee with you to the mountain, go out of Sodom, and stop not in all the plain. The judgments which are coming on every unbelieving soul, will amply vindicate your honour, whilst your personal safety will abundantly repay your toil.

Yet go not alone, if you can by any means induce others to accompany you in your heavenly flight. Yea, be zealous and active in hastening forward the day that is spoken of in our

text. Though the work itself is God's, yet it is to be accomplished by human means. If salvation be through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through him alone, he must be made known to the benighted heathen: for "how can they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how can they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without a preacher^a?"

I thank God that means are now using by different societies to diffuse the Holy Scriptures throughout the world, and to send forth missionaries to instruct both Jews and Gentiles. Aid these societies then with all your power. It is particularly said in the verse following my text, that those who wait upon the Lord, "*bring their silver and their gold with them.*" Let not this be forgotten by you. Let your property be consecrated to this holy service: account this its best and most appropriate use: and, instead of giving grudgingly or of necessity to so good a work, regard it as your highest honour to contribute even in the smallest degree to the salvation of your fellow-creatures, and to the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom upon earth.]

2. To those who have no such blessed object in view—

[What shall I say? I would take up a lamentation over them; and, in the language of surprise and grief, say, "Who are these who do *not* fly as a cloud, or as the doves to their windows?" What! have they never heard what a Saviour there is? or, are they ignorant how much they stand in need of mercy through him? Dear Brethren, be persuaded that there is no refuge for you but in Him: to him you *must* come, if you would ever find rest unto your souls. I beseech you, therefore, flee to him as your only hope: be in earnest: let not the doves flying to their windows outstrip you in your course. And bring to him all that you are, and all that you have. So shall the angels in the presence of God rejoice over you: so shall the Church of Christ also be edified through you: and so shall you be meet for the Church above, whither a whole cloud of witnesses are gone before you, and where you shall soon unite with them for ever in the service of your God.]

^a Rom. x. 14.

MI.

EXCELLENCY OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

Isai. lx. 13.—*The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee; the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary: and I will make the place of my feet glorious.*

WHILST we admire, as of necessity we must, the richness and diversity of the imagery which is employed to depict the beauty of the Christian Church, we must be careful to seize the truths which are so exhibited: for in this the sublime descriptions of the prophets differ materially from the poetic flights of other authors; they declare what actually exists; whereas the poetical representations of uninspired men are for the most part either mere fictions, or truth rendered fictitious by the high colouring that is given to it. The description here given of the glory of the latter day is exceeding grand. The whole creation, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, contribute to it according to their several ability. Not men only, but even flocks and herds, are spoken of as coming voluntarily to consecrate themselves to the Lord; and in my text, the woods of Lebanon yield their produce, to adorn the Church, and to glorify their God.

The particular expressions in my text lead me to set before you,

I. The constitution of the Church of Christ—

From Lebanon the wood was brought for the erection of Solomon's temple^a: and all the glory of Lebanon shall be brought to our Zion also, to build an habitation for our incarnate God. By "the fir-tree and the pine," I understand the great and mighty of the earth; whilst "the box" represents the poor and humble, whether in respect of civil rank, or intellectual capacity. Both the one and the other of these shall be employed as constituent parts of God's spiritual temple. For each a suitable place shall be found, and for each an appropriate use.

The high and mighty shall be brought on a level with the lowest—

[Christianity does not at all interfere with distinctions in civil life: they are the appointment of God himself; and are necessary to the well-being of mankind. But in a spiritual view, the greatest monarch upon earth must be brought on a

^a 2 Chron. ii. 16.

level with the meanest of his subjects. The axe must be laid to the root of all his pride and self-sufficiency, and he must be felled by the operation of the word and Spirit of God. Every man is a sinner before God: every man must be made to feel and acknowledge his guilt: every man must seek for mercy through the blood and righteousness of that Divine Saviour who died for him. Every man must live altogether in a state of dependence upon God, not merely as a God of providence, but especially as a God of grace; and must receive continually fresh supplies of grace and strength out of the fulness that is treasured up for him in Christ. This is not the work of the poor only, but of the rich also: the most learned philosopher must in this respect feel himself on a par with the most illiterate of the human race. All must equally be taught of God; and all “be saved equally by grace through faith in Christ.”]

The poor, on the contrary, are raised to an equality with the highest—

[There is not a blessing which the poorest may not obtain, to the full extent that it can be enjoyed by the rich and great. The Apostles themselves were not selected from the higher or more intelligent classes, but from the lowest walks of life. A few poor fishermen were raised up to be the teachers of the whole world. And if it be thought that this was a peculiar case, and that the poor by reason of their disadvantages are greatly inferior to the rich, I must say, that, for the most part, the very reverse of this is true; and that God yet daily, in ten thousand instances, “reveals to babes the things which he has hid from the wise and prudent^b.” The very circumstance of the poor having so little in this world leads them more simply to depend on God; and their conscious want of human knowledge leads them to implore more humbly and more earnestly the teaching of God’s Spirit: and hence by coming to God “hungry, they are filled with good things, whilst the rich are sent empty away^c.” Thus does God still “take the beggar from the dunghill, to set him among the princes^d,” and it is still daily seen, that “the box” occupies a place in the Church of God which the loftiest cedar in Lebanon might envy.

That this is the constitution of the Church of Christ, is not left to be inferred from the figurative language of my text: it is expressly stated by St. James, who says, “Let the brother of *low* degree rejoice, in that he is *exalted*; but the *rich*, in that he is *made low*^e.” Here, I say, the whole of what I have asserted is stated plainly, and without a figure.]

^b Matt. xi. 25.

^c Luke i. 53.

^d 1 Sam. ii. 8.

^e Jam. i. 9, 10.

I now proceed to notice,

II. The excellence of that constitution—

In our text, this particular constitution is set forth,

1. As ornamental to the Church itself—

[Let any one view the Church as so constituted. Let the loftiest “firs and pines” be viewed in union with the humble “box;” the kings and princes of the earth assembled at the footstool of the Divine Majesty in concert with the lowliest classes of mankind: all there are bowing their knees together before their common Lord and Master: the same confessions, how humiliating soever they may be, proceed equally from the lips of all: the same petitions for grace, for mercy, for peace, for strength, are urged by all, with equal and united importunity: the same devout acknowledgments are poured forth by all for blessings received: the word delivered to them all is pronounced with the same authority, and entire submission to it required from them all under the same awful sanctions: the same invitations and promises are held forth to all: and the same glorious inheritance assured to all who receive and obey the word. View them all as then sitting down together at the table of the Lord, as guests equally invited; and equally accepted, by the great Master of the feast; all eating of the same bread; all drinking of the same cup; and all receiving into their souls the same heavenly communications; and all returning to their homes refreshed and strengthened for their future labours. Say, is not this lovely? Is it not a very emblem of heaven itself, where a poor Lazarus, whose very sores the dogs but lately licked, because he had not a friend to bind them up, now sits down with all the Prophets and Apostles of the Lord at the heavenly banquet, his head reclined in the very bosom of Abraham himself? Yes; thus it is in the Church below: “The rich and the poor meet together; and the Lord is the Maker of them all,” the Father of them all, the portion of them all^f. Amongst them all, there is no room either for contempt or envy; the honour and the happiness of all being wholly independent on worldly circumstances, and dependent only on the access to God which each obtains for himself, and the consequent manifestations of God’s love which he is privileged to enjoy. Their degree of usefulness to the Church may indeed be affected by the situations which they severally occupy in civil life, and the qualifications with which they are endowed: but, as in the natural body, so in Christ’s mystical body, though one member may have a higher office than another, none can dispense with the services of the rest: “the

^f Prov. xxix. 13.

eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you; nor can the head say to the feet, I have no need of you." Every member has its proper place, and its proper office: and, if one were wanting, the whole body would be defective, and deformed. But in Christ's body not one member is wanting: every place is occupied; God having assigned to every member the situation adapted for it: and in the perfect adaptation of each to its proper ends, and the harmonious exercise of all for the general good, the beauty of the whole consists^g. In truth, it is "for the beautifying of the place of God's sanctuary" that this assemblage of the high and low, "the pine and the box, is ordained: and we cannot but acknowledge, that in this view "Zion is beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth^h."]

2. As honourable to God—

[To this point God himself calls our particular attention. "I will plant," says he, "in the wilderness, the cedar, the shittah-tree, and the myrtle, and the oil-tree; I will set in the desert the fir-tree, and the pine, and the box-tree together; that they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created itⁱ." Now why, I would ask, does he lay such peculiar stress upon this, but because it reflects peculiar lustre on his character, and displays in a most endearing point of view his glorious perfections? Truly "this does make the place of his feet glorious;" because it shews, that, whilst he is "Lord of all, he is equally rich in mercy to all who call upon him^k." In his regards, there is no difference between one and another: "there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ, that is, the image of Christ upon the soul, is all, and in all^l."

Let us suppose for a moment that there were the same kind of partiality in him as he complains of in many of his professing people: "If there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment, and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool; are ye not then partial in yourselves, and become judges who reason ill^m?" I say, let us suppose such a partiality in God; and how unamiable would he appear! But "there is no such respect of persons with himⁿ:" the humblest

^g See 1 Cor. xii. 12—22.

^h Ps. xlviii. 1, 2.

ⁱ Isai. xli. 19, 20.

^k Rom. x. 12.

^l Col. iii. 11.

^m Jam. ii. 2—4.

ⁿ Acts x. 34.

shrub in all the woods of Lebanon is as dear to him as the loftiest cedar there: yea, the weaker they are in themselves, the more tenderly he watches over them for good, that he may “display in them the excellency of his own power^o,” and “perfect his own strength in their weakness^p.” Even the least and meanest of them all he regards as “trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord; and in them he is, and will be, glorified^q.”

In this then God acts altogether worthy of himself, and shews, that, as he is the Maker of all, so is he the Father, and the Friend of all.]

APPLICATION—

Such being the constitution of the Church,

1. Let us all seek to become members of it—

[Are there here any of the higher orders? I would say, give yourselves to the Lord, to serve him with your whole hearts. This is what you *must* do, if ever you would be happy; for in the very words before my text you are told, that “the kingdom and nation that will not serve his Church shall perish.” Do not imagine that your elevation among men can procure for you any exemption from your duty to God; your distinctions only render your way to heaven more difficult. For persons elevated in society to be humbled and brought upon a level with the poorest of mankind, is no easy matter: but it *must* be done — — — O beg of God to accomplish it for you, by the mighty working of his power! — — —

To you who are of the lower classes I would say, Rejoice, that whilst your fellow-creatures perhaps are ready to despise you on account of the disadvantages under which you labour, God loves you, and made it a distinguishing feature of the Messiah’s kingdom, that “the poor should have the Gospel preached to them^r.” Whatever the rich may imagine, you of the two are more favoured of God than they: for whilst “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven,” “God has chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom^s.” Labour then to secure this privilege: and, though you have none of the external recommendations of “the pine and fir,” you need not fear but that God will accept your services, and make you “pillars in his temple that shall go no more out^t.”]

2. Let us all endeavour to promote the establishment of it in the world—

^o 2 Cor. iv. 7.

^p 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^q Isai. lxi. 3

^r Matt. xi. 5.

^s Jam. ii. 5.

^t Rev. iii. 12.

[Low as the state of the Church at present is, it shall one day, like the stone which Nebuchadnezzar saw, “become a mountain, and fill the whole earth^u.” “The mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains; and all nations shall flow unto it^x.” The stateliest trees shall then be as ambitious of contributing to its glory, as those of the humblest growth.” Let us then, in an assured prospect of that day, send forth workmen to Lebanon, to fell the lofty firs, and to bring in the humble box^y — — — So shall the sanctuary of God be enlarged and beautified, and his name be glorified throughout all the earth.]

^u Dan. ii. 35.

^x Isai. ii. 2.

^y If this were the subject of a *Mission Sermon*, the thought of heathens and savages in every quarter of the world flocking to Christ, “as doves to their windows,” (ver. 8.) might here be opened to advantage.

MII.

THE FUTURE PROSPERITY OF THE JEWISH CHURCH.

Isai. lx. 15, 16. *Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings: and thou shalt know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.*

THE Church of God, previous to our Saviour’s first advent, looked forward to that event with eager expectation: and with the same holy feelings ought we to look forward to that advent of which the Scriptures so largely speak, when he shall take to him his great power, and establish his kingdom over the face of the whole earth. That such a period will arrive, there can be no doubt; and that it is fast approaching, seems clearly intimated in the prophetic writings. It is not necessary for us to fix the dates of prophecy with such accuracy as to mark the precise year, when this great event shall commence, or be accomplished: an obscurity necessarily hangs over such predictions: it is not the design of God so entirely to make known the designs of his providence, as to put us into complete possession of them before they have occurred;

but only so to reveal them, that, when they shall have occurred, we may know them to have been fore-ordained by him, and to have fulfilled his eternal counsels. The chapter before us is altogether a description of that event. As for any thing which took place at the return of the Jews from Babylon, or even in the apostolic age, it is altogether out of the question, as a fulfilment of this prophecy. It is agreed, on all hands, that the events here predicted remain to be accomplished. And what those events are, I will endeavour more fully to explain.

Let us consider then,

I. To what these words refer—

Good men, especially in later ages, have been so fond of spiritualizing the Scriptures, that they have, in many instances, totally overlooked their primary meaning. The chapter before us, for instance, they have applied to the Gentile Church, and have almost entirely lost sight of the Jews as comprehended in it. And I cannot but think, that the grievous neglect of which the Christian Church has been guilty, in relation to the welfare of the Jews, is very greatly to be attributed to ministers themselves, who have either kept out of sight the prophecies altogether, or interpreted them in an erroneous way. *The chapter before us relates to the Jews; nor can any person with an unprejudiced mind put any other sense upon it.*

Hear St. Paul's explanation of it—

[To understand it aright, we must take into our view the two last verses of the preceding chapter: "The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord." To whom now do these words refer? Consult the Apostle, when citing them, in his Epistle to the Romans^a: "I would not have you ignorant of this mystery," says he, "that blindness in part is happened to *Israel*, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all *Israel* shall be saved: *as it is written*, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from *Jacob*: for this is my covenant unto *them*, when I shall take

^a Rom. xi. 25—28.

away *their* sins. Does any doubt remain on the mind as to the Apostle's meaning? His next words will dispel it utterly: "As concerning the Gospel, they are enemies for your sakes; but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes." There can be no doubt, therefore, but that the Apostle understood the prophet as speaking altogether of the Jews.]

Examine the entire contents of the chapter—

[The chapter is a continuation of those words which the Apostle has cited and explained. "Arise, shine; for *thy* light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon *thee*. For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon *thee*, and his glory shall be seen upon *thee*. And the Gentiles shall come to *thy* light, and kings to the brightness of *thy* rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to *thee*: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together; and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto *thee*, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto *thee*. The multitude of camels shall cover *thee*, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto *thee*, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto *thee*: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory. Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows? Surely the Isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring *thy* sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the Lord thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified *thee*. And the sons of strangers shall build up *thy* walls, and their kings shall minister unto *thee*: for in my wrath I smote *thee*, but in my favour have I had mercy on *thee*. Therefore *thy* gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto *thee* the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought: for the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto *thee*, the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. The sons also of them that afflicted *thee* shall come bending unto *thee*; and all they that despised *thee* shall bow down themselves at the soles of *thy* feet; and they shall call *thee*, the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel." Then come the

words of my text, "Whereas *thou* hast been forsaken and hated;" and so on.

Thus have I cited the whole preceding context, to shew, that it is all one continued address to the *Jewish Church*; and that, from beginning to end, there is not one syllable that can warrant the application of it to the Christian Church. You will observe, that the Jewish Church is spoken of in terms not at all applicable to the Christian Church; (for it is the Jewish, and not the Christian Church, of whom God says, "In my wrath I smote thee; but in my favour have I had mercy on thee:) and you will further notice, that throughout the whole of it, *the Gentiles and their kings are contrasted with the Jewish Church*, to which they minister. And all this is the rather to be noticed, in order that you may see how little ground there is for that perversion of the passage which they are guilty of, who pass over the Jewish Church, and apply the whole of it to the Gentiles: and at the same time, that you may learn to read the Scriptures with an unprejudiced eye, and to expect the fulfilment of them according to their true import.]

Having ascertained the just application of the words before us, let us consider,

II. The glorious prospects which they hold forth—

The Jewish Church was forsaken and hated at the time of the Babylonish captivity: and still greater hatred and contempt has she endured since the degradation inflicted on her by the Romans. To have any connexion with her is judged a reproach, throughout the whole world^b — — — But there is a time coming, when she shall be again honoured, both by God and man: yea, "she shall be made an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations." She shall be honoured,

1. In the number and dignity of her converts—

[Bold and beautiful are the figures here used by the prophet, for the purpose of describing this event. The whole Gentile world, together with their kings, are viewed as a nursing-mother, who administers to her infant offspring what God has given her for its support. In the first instance, they join the Jewish Church, as her children; but, having done this, they themselves assume the office of a parent, accounting all that they possess as valuable only in proportion as it may

^b See Lam. ii. 15, 16. sadly descriptive of the treatment to which they have been, and still are, subjected even in the Christian world.

minister to the Church's welfare. This is more plainly declared in another chapter, where God says, "I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders; and kings shall be thy nursing-fathers, and their queens thy nursing-mothers^c." Having already brought before you the whole chapter, I forbear to notice it again, any further than to say, that, whilst the accession of converts to the Jewish Church is there depicted in such vivid colours, that you see it, as it were, actually taking place before your eyes, it is particularly said, that "they bring their silver and their gold with them^d," so anxious will every true convert be to advance the Church's welfare, and the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom throughout the world. We must not however forget, that God is honoured in the conversion of the poor, as well as of the rich; of the meanest beggar, as well as of a monarch upon his throne. When the "glory of Lebanon shall come unto the Church," not only shall the noble "fir" or the majestic "pine" be seen, but the low and humble "box;" and equally shall they all, in their places, contribute to "beautify the place of God's sanctuary, and to make the place of his feet glorious^e."]

2. In the special favour of our God—

[In former days, God had shewn himself to be the Friend and Protector of his people: in Egypt, in the Wilderness, in Canaan, by numberless manifestations of his power and grace. And in days that are yet future, shall there be such evidence of his presence with them, as will leave no doubt on their minds, or in the minds of others, that "God is with them of a truth:" for in the very next chapter it is said, "All that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed^f." Nor need we look for miracles to establish this. There is, in the very work of God upon the soul, abundant evidence that it is his work. This is well described by the prophet, in the words following my text: "For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron. I will make thine officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. Violence shall be no more heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise^g." Here, under the figure of temporal prosperity, such as obtained in Israel under the reign of Solomon^h, is set forth the piety of Zion's converts; none exercising any more their corrupt propensities, or resting any longer in the possession of mere moral worth; but all exhibiting the brightest

^c Isai. xlix. 22, 23.

^d ver. 9.

^e ver. 13.

^f Isai. lxi. 9.

^g ver. 17, 18.

^h 2 Chron. ix. 20.

virtues, and abounding in the sublimest graces; "their very brass becoming gold; their iron, silver; their wood, brass; and their stones, iron." Such was the change wrought on the converts on the day of Pentecost: and who could be at a loss to find the Author of it? The creation itself does not more loudly proclaim its divine original, than this work does, wherever it is wrought: and to the person's own conscience it bears witness, "I, the Lord, am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the Mighty one of Jacob."]

Let me now call your attention to,

III. The interest which the whole world has in the accomplishment of them—

Look at the present state whether of the Jewish or Gentile world—

[Truly, wherever we turn our eyes, we see nothing but sin and misery. "All the foundations of the earth are out of courseⁱ." In private life, how little of God is seen! In communities, what "oppression, what violence, what wasting and destruction," fill the world! Say, Is there not a call for such a change as has been described? Methinks "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together," till it be accomplished^k.]

Contemplate, on the other hand, the predicted change—

[Our prophet beautifully describes it in another place: "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking-child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea^l." This exactly accords with the representation which we have been considering. Peace and holiness will pervade the whole Church: yea, such peace will the Church enjoy, that it shall need no walls or gates for its protection: "her walls shall be salvation, and her gates be praise." With such a fulness of blessings, too, shall she be enriched, that no created comforts shall be wanted by her to administer their light: neither "sun nor moon" can add to her; for "the Lord himself will be a light unto her, and her God her glory." Nor

ⁱ Ps. lxxxii. 5.

^k Rom. viii. 22.

^l Isai. xi. 6—9.

shall this blessedness be transient, as in former days: "the Lord shall be to her an everlasting light; and the days of her mourning shall be ended." At all former periods there have been sons of Belial to dishonour and afflict her: but in that day "her people shall be all righteous, even trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, in whom he shall be glorified." Such a state of things, it may be said, is impossible; there being scarcely so much as an appearance of any such thing upon the earth. But that which is at present but "a little one, shall become a thousand; and a small one, a strong nation: Jehovah himself will effect it: the Lord shall hasten it in his time^m."

O, what a different world will this then be! Should we not pray for this happy time? Should we not labour to bring it forward? What exertions should we not make, if, peradventure, we may but collect a few of the stones with which this temple shall be built!]

LEARN from hence,

1. What should be our own personal state before God—

[We see what the Church is to the whole world: such should we individually be, in our respective circles; an excellency and a joy to all who behold us; a source of good to all connected with us; objects of complacency even to God himself. O Brethren, let us not contemplate these things in the millennial Church, and forget that they should characterize the Church in all ages! We deceive ourselves grievously in this matter. We think that such and such things became the primitive saints, but are unsuited to us; or that they will be proper for the millennial period, but are not so for the present hour. Religion is the same in every age: nay more, the assistances for attaining it are the same in every age. The Holy Spirit should be poured out upon us, if we sought his influences as we ought: "if we have not, it is because we ask not; or because we ask amiss." Prayer has the same power as ever; and, if we were instant in it, would prevail with God so to fill us out of his own fulness, that we might "stand perfect and complete in all the will of Godⁿ."]]

2. What we should do for the benefit of the world—

[We should labour especially to extend the knowledge of Christ, which alone will prevail for the diffusion of holiness or happiness throughout the world. More particularly we should labour for the conversion of the Jews; seeing that they are God's appointed instruments for the conversion of the

^m ver. 19—22.

ⁿ Col. iv. 12.

world. It is to *their* light that the Gentiles shall come; and “on *their* skirt that the Gentiles shall lay hold, saying, We will go with you, for we perceive that God is with you of a truth.” Some are apt to imagine, that a zeal for the welfare of the Jewish people argues somewhat of indifference for the Gentiles. But, if we had no personal regard for the Jews at all, yet, for the Gentiles’ sake, we should labour for *their* welfare; because it is through *them* that salvation is to come to the whole Gentile world. Not that we are to set the two in opposition to each other: there is ample scope for exertion amongst them both; and we may hope to be partially useful to them both. But the great period to which we are looking forward, when “the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ,” will be introduced by the conversion of the Jews; “the receiving of whom shall be as life from the dead, to the whole world^o.”

This, then, I say to you; Begin the work, which kings and queens are destined to carry on: draw forth, if I may so say, the breast to them; and let all the affections of your souls be deeply engaged in administering to their wants. Bring, as the converts of the latter day will do, “your silver and your gold with you;” and know, that you can never expend it more beneficially to the world, or more honourably to your God, than by promoting that good work, of which the prophets have so largely spoken, and for the ultimate attainment of which the Saviour himself poured forth his soul unto the death.]

^o Rom. xi. 15.

MIII.

THE CHURCH'S PROSPERITY.

Isai. lx. 19, 20. *The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.*

AS there are many passages in the prophets which admit of a mystical, as well as literal, meaning, so there are many which must be interpreted altogether in a mystical sense. There was nothing in the state of the Jews after their return from Babylon that could in any wise be called an accomplishment of the chapter before us. The whole passage can relate to

nothing but the future prosperity of the Christian church. There is a time coming when the Church shall exchange its despised, impoverished, persecuted state for a state of felicity and honour; when its spiritual blessings in particular shall be both permanent and abundant, as an earnest of that infinite and everlasting happiness which its members shall enjoy in a better world.

The text may be understood as referring,

I. To the millennial period—

The terms here used, import that the prosperity of the Church shall one day be,

1. Exalted in its degree—

[The shining of the sun and moon may well be understood as expressing the greatest temporal happiness. But we are not to suppose that there will be a total privation of temporal blessings from the Church: (on the contrary, there is reason to expect that its prosperity, in respect of outward things, will be greatly increased.) The positive declarations must here, as in many other passages, be understood in a comparative sense^a, and as implying, that the spiritual state of the Church will be so exalted as altogether to eclipse the greatest of earthly comforts: *they* shall be lost as it were, in the enjoyment which the saints shall have of God. This is beautifully represented as though the sun and moon hid their heads through shame^b; and it is even now realized in the experience of those who enjoy much of the light of God's countenance. What "glorying in God" there will be in that day we may conceive, if we only suppose every member of the Church adopting the sentiments and language of "the sweet singer of Israel"^c—]

2. Lasting in its duration—

[As the shining of the sun and moon imports prosperity, so does the withdrawing of their light imply the heaviest calamities. That the Church will have no mixture of bitterness in her cup, we do not suppose: but, as, by means of her intimate communion with God, her earthly joys will be no joys, so, by the same means, her earthly sorrows will be no sorrows: they will be all forgotten, as it were, in the abundance of her exalted happiness. This effect has often arisen from fellowship with God: Paul and Silas, notwithstanding their backs were torn with scourges, and their feet were fastened in the stocks,

^a Hos. vi. 6.

^b Isai. xxiv. 23.

^c Ps. cxlv. 1—12.

sang praises to God at midnight^d: and many, far inferior to them in gifts, have also been enabled to “glory in tribulation.” How much more then shall this be the case when God shall take to him his great power, and reign on earth, and the graces of all his people be proportionably increased! Surely “their days of mourning shall be ended;” or, if a cloud occasionally intervene for a moment, their sun shall never *set*, their moon shall never be *withdrawn*; yea, the very clouds themselves shall only occasion the light to burst forth again with greater splendour^e.]

The text however will not receive its full accomplishment till we come,

II. To the eternal state—

Then the figurative expressions in the text will fall short of, as much as now they seem to exceed, the truth. The happiness of the Church shall then be,

1. In God only—

[There will be no room for carnal enjoyments in heaven: there “they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels of God.” While we are on earth, God communicates much happiness to us by means of his creatures: but in heaven we shall no more drink water from such polluted cisterns, but go to the fountain-head itself^f. There we shall “see him face to face,” and behold all the brightness of his glory. There all the mysteries of his love will be opened to us, and its incomprehensible heights and depths be made plain to our shallow capacities. O what shouts of praise shall we then utter! What glorying in God shall we then express^g! — — —]

2. In God continually—

[*Here* the very necessities of our nature required an intermission of our joy: the body itself needed to be recruited with intervals of rest: but *there* we shall “not rest day nor night.” Our days of mourning will be so entirely ended, that we shall never have our light obscured for one single moment. There will be nothing from without to trouble and perplex us; nothing from within to furnish matter of distress^h. We shall bask in the unclouded beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and enjoy one eternal day. Then not only our carnal, but even our spiritual, joys that we tasted below, will appear as nothing: glorious as the present state of believers is, it has

^d Acts xvi. 23—25. ^e Isai. lx. 20.

^f Rev. xxi. 23. and xxii. 5. “They have no need of the sun,” &c.

^g Rev. v. 12, 13.

^h Compare Isai. xlix. 10. with Rev. vii. 15—17. and xxi. 4.

no glory by reason of that which excellethⁱ: here our best frames have an alloy of sorrow, and are of short continuance: but there our happiness will be without mixture, intermission, or end.]

This subject cannot fail of suggesting such REFLECTIONS as follow:

1. How evidently is religion a source of happiness!

[It is intolerable that men should asperse religion as a source of melancholy. What if men's sins, or mistakes, or bodily infirmities make them melancholy; is this to be imputed to religion? Is Reason to be decried because all persons do not exercise it as they ought; or the sun in the firmament to be abhorred, because all do not make a just improvement of its light? If they who despise religion would seek to attain it in their hearts, they should soon find that all creature-comforts are, in comparison of it, but as the taper before the meridian sun. As for the benefits arising from it in the eternal world, we forbear to mention them: for if it will not make men happier, even in this present state, than any thing else can do, we will be content that it shall be utterly abandoned. But we have no fears on this head: and the very people that deride it, know, that they envy in their hearts the happiness of the saints. O that all would seek their happiness in God, in God supremely, and in God only!]

2. What a different world will this be when the promised period shall arrive!

[So eminent and universal will the piety of mankind then be, that it will appear as if all the holy martyrs were risen from the dead, and brought to live again on earth; and as though Christ himself were come down again from heaven to reign visibly in the midst of them^k. Instead of such a general neglect of God as now obtains, a supreme regard to him will universally prevail, and a holy glorying in him be heard on every side. Surely the saints will then enjoy a heaven upon earth. Nor do we apprehend this period to be very distant. O that God would hasten it! O that we could see the dawn of that glorious day! But, if it be not permitted to us to see it, let us hope that we shall be still better employed, and be reaping the full harvest of what they will gather only the first-fruits. Let us in the mean time set our affections on things above, and, in reply to that question, Who will shew us any good? let us be ever ready to answer with the Psalmist, Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us^l.]

ⁱ 2 Cor. iii. 10.

^k Rev. xx. 4.

^l Ps. iv. 6, 7.

MIV.

CHRIST'S COMMISSION.

Isai. lxi. 1—3. *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.*

IMPORTANT as these words evidently are on account of the blessed truths contained in them, they come recommended to us with double force, from their having been made the subject of our Lord's first discourse after his entrance on his prophetic office. The interpretation of them, which he has suggested, leaves us no doubt respecting the propriety of applying them to him^a. While therefore we "begin at this Scripture, and preach unto you Jesus," we may truly say, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." May the rehearsal of it excite amongst us, not merely a transient admiration, but a deep and permanent desire to enjoy the blessings revealed in it. The prophet, speaking of the Messiah, declares,

I. His call to his office—

Our Lord was consecrated to his prophetic office by a visible unction of the Holy Spirit.

[As the priests and kings were separated to their respective offices by pouring oil upon their heads, so, on some occasions, were the prophets also^b. Our Lord, who, in all his offices, infinitely excelled all that had gone before him, was consecrated by an unction, of which the anointing oil was but a type and shadow. "The Spirit of the Lord God" was poured out upon him at the time of his baptism; and the descent of the Spirit in a visible shape, like a dove, upon him, marked him as divinely commissioned to execute the work and

^a Luke iv. 17—22.

^b 1 Kings xix. 16.

office of the Messiah^c. Indeed, he was called Messiah, and Christ, from that very circumstance of his being “anointed with the oil of gladness above all that ever had partaken” of that heavenly gift^d.]

By that unction too he was qualified for the discharge of the office committed to him.

[Though, as God, our Saviour was incapable of improvement, yet, as man, “he grew in wisdom as he grew in stature,” and needed to be furnished with those gifts and graces, which were proper for the discharge of his mediatorial office. Accordingly we read, that the “Spirit was given to him, not by measure,” as to other prophets, but in all his fulness^e; and that it rested on him as a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and of might, a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord^f. Thus was he both called and qualified at the same time: for though he was destined for his work from eternity, and prepared for it from his first conception in the virgin’s womb, yet were not his qualifications completed till the great seal of heaven was affixed to his commission, and he was openly consecrated to the service of God.]

The prophet proceeds to open at large,

II. The commission given him—

The terms, in which his commission are expressed, have especial reference to the jubilees that were proclaimed every fiftieth year. He was sent,

1. To *offer* salvation to all who *needed* it—

[At the time of jubilee all who had by any means been reduced to sell their estates, and to surrender up themselves and families as slaves to their creditors, were liberated from their bondage, and restored to the full possession of their inheritance, the very instant the trumpet sounded^g. The Gospel is that trumpet, and it proclaims “liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;” and our Lord’s office was to sound this trumpet, to announce these glad tidings, to declare that this acceptable year was arrived, and that the “day” was come wherein God would take “vengeance” on all their enemies and oppressors. These are glad tidings indeed to those who are sensible of their bondage to sin and Satan, and who know that they have sold the inheritance of heaven for the pleasures of sin: but to those who are unconscious of their guilt and misery, the sound of the trumpet

^c John i. 32—34.

^d Τοὺς μετόχους σου. Heb. i. 9. with Ps. xlv. 7.

^e John iii. 34.

^f Isai. xi. 2, 3.

^g Lev. xxv. 10, 41

seems an empty noise, or rather, an insult, as implying a state of degradation, which they do not feel and will not acknowledge. Hence our Lord's commission, though extending to all, was more particularly to "*the meek*:" for it is to them only, who are humbled under their wretched condition, that the offer of a free salvation contains any welcome news.]

2. To *impart* salvation to all who *desired* it—

[To "the broken hearted, and the mourners in Zion" he came to "*appoint*" and to "*give*" the blessings they desired. He was expected as "the consolation of Israel;" and, in that character, he particularly appeared. Were any bowed down with "a spirit of heaviness," and "mourning in" dust and "ashes?" he came to "bind up their broken hearts," and to exhilarate their souls; that they might be comforted, and become as persons anointed with oil, and arrayed in gayest apparel for some great festivity^h. We may conceive the feelings of a man who in one instant has been restored, from the lowest degree of servitude and want, to affluence and honour; but we must experience the blessedness of salvation, before we can form any adequate idea of the joy and gladness which Christ infuses into the contrite and believing soul.]

Thus far our Lord himself applied the passage: but the prophet adds,

III. The ends for which he executes this commission—

Our Lord in every part of his work connected two great ends:

1. The benefit of man—

[Though "once we were planted a noble vine, we are become the degenerate plants of a strange vine; and instead of producing good fruit, we bring forth nothing but grapes of Sodom, and clusters of Gomorrhaⁱ." But Christ desires to rectify our fallen nature, and to make us "trees of righteousness;" that, "instead of the thorn may come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier the myrtle-tree^k," that so we may be as trees "planted and watered by the hand of God." This was the end of his mission; and it is invariably the effect of his ministration. Let us only view the converts on the day of Pentecost, and in them we shall behold a just specimen of the effects produced by the preached Gospel: and, to whomsoever

^h There is in the original a paronomasia which cannot be expressed in a translation; he will give *Phear* for *Ephar*, that is, "beauty for ashes."

ⁱ Jer. ii. 21. Deut. xxxii. 32.

^k Isai. lv. 13.

the word of Christ comes with power, the same blessings are given; they are transplanted from the wilderness into the garden of the Lord, and “they have their fruit unto holiness, and their end everlasting life.”]

2. The glory of God—

[This could not but be the great end which Jesus ever had in view: he had sinned if there had been any consideration in his mind superior or even comparable to this. And how well was his commission calculated to promote it! View him as undertaking our cause, and coming from heaven to redeem us; can we fail of admiring the love and condescension of that God who sent him? Hear the tidings he proclaims; a full, a free, an everlasting salvation to perishing sinners: are we not filled with wonder at such stupendous mercy? See the myriads whose broken hearts he has healed; see them rejoicing on earth, or shouting their hallelujahs in heaven; are we not ready to clap our hands for joy, and to break forth into acclamations and hosannahs? There is not any part of Christ’s work, whether as performed by him, or enjoyed by us, but what calls upon us to glorify God with our whole hearts: and to all eternity will the praises of God resound from myriads of the redeemed, who, with united voices will exclaim, “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever¹.]

This subject may be IMPROVED,

1. For conviction—

[All profess to hope for salvation through Christ, even though they be insensible of their lost and helpless state. But, if it be to the meek, the mourners, and the broken-hearted, that Christ came, what can they have to do with him, whose hearts are whole, and who are unhumbled before him? “They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick: nor did he come to call the righteous (those who fancy themselves righteous), but sinners to repentance.” Let none then expect to participate his salvation, unless they feel their need of it, and consent to receive it as his free unmerited gift.]

2. For consolation—

[They who are sensible that they have sold heaven and their own souls “for a thing of nought,” are ready to say, “Can such a lawful captive ever be delivered^m?” We answer, You may instantly cast off your bonds and assert your liberty, if you will but accept the proffered mercy. Only believe in Christ, and the forfeited inheritance of heaven shall be yours.

¹ Rev. v. 13.

^m Isai. xlix. 24, 25.

Arise then, and sing, thou that sittest in the dust; put off thy sackcloth, and gird thee with gladness. Be not afraid, as though the tidings were too good to be true: the jubilee is come, and the trumpet now sounds by the command of God himself: you have not to pay any thing for your deliverance; but to receive it freely: you have nothing to fear from your enemies; for "the day of God's vengeance is come," and he will bruise all your enemies under your feet. Let but these tidings sink into your hearts; and God will glorify himself in your eternal happiness.]

MV.

BLESSEDNESS OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE.

Isai. lxi. 9. *All that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed.*

IN the different countries of the world, the inhabitants are characterized by distinctive differences in their features; and from generation to generation, notwithstanding the vast diversity of countenances, that peculiarity of cast pervades them all. Nevertheless, amidst all the nations where they are scattered, the descendants of Abraham may be clearly discerned from the original inhabitants of the soil: they all shew, by their countenances, their relation to their common parent. And may we not say respecting his spiritual children also, that *they* may be distinguished from others? True it is, that in outward appearance they resemble those around them; but in heart, in spirit, and in life, they are different from all the world; and yet, however distant from each other in climate, in education, and in habits, they all resemble each other, and bear the stamp and character of God, as their common Father.

In the passage before us, which foretells the increase of the Church in the Apostolic and Millennial periods, this circumstance is noticed: a peculiar blessedness is said to belong to the people of the Lord, even such a blessedness as should be visible to all who beheld them, and should distinguish them from all other persons on the face of the earth. In confirmation of this singular fact, we propose to shew,

I. That the Lord's people are pre-eminently blessed—

1. They are so—

[Consult *the names given to them* in the Holy Scriptures: they are “the children of light,” “the children of obedience,” “the children of God;” whilst all others are the children of darkness, of disobedience, of the wicked one — — — Consider *the state into which they are brought*, a state of pardon, of peace, of holiness, of joy: whilst the whole world besides lieth in wickedness, and are utter strangers to all the blessings of the New Covenant — — — Consider further *their prospects in the future world*, they being made heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; whilst to all others there is nothing but “a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation” to consume them — — — Are not such persons then “a blessed seed?”]

2. They were so, in God's purpose, before they came into the world—

[We are astonished that many who profess to approve of the Articles of the Church of England, should be so averse to hear the smallest mention made of the counsels and decrees of God. That it is not profitable to be always insisting upon them, we readily admit; and that to dive too curiously into them, as though we were capable of comprehending the deepest mysteries in them, is highly presumptuous: but we must not on that account keep them wholly out of view, or be afraid of speaking as the Scripture speaks. God did most assuredly know from all eternity who were, or should be, his: and he did “choose them in Christ before the foundation of the world,” and “predestinate them to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself^a,” and “he gave them to Christ^b,” to be redeemed by his blood, to be saved by his grace, and to be made heirs of his glory^c: yea, he “wrote their names in the Lamb's book of life before the foundation of the world^d.” How truly blessed then must they be! — — —]

3. They will be so to all eternity—

[All their present privileges and blessings are only preparatory to their future state, when their happiness will be perfect, unchangeable, and everlasting. They are to be “made meet for their inheritance” in this world; and, when they are completely ready for their nuptials with their heavenly Bridegroom, he will come and take them to himself, that they may live for ever in the perfect fruition of his love^e — — — To bring them to this, was God's original design in choosing them. To

^a Eph. i. 4, 5.^b John xvii. 2, 6.^c 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.^d Rev. xiii. 8.^e Rev. xix. 7.

fit them for it, is the end of all his dispensations, both of providence and grace. And to possess it, is the one object which they have in view, in all their labours, in all their sufferings, in all their conflicts.]

Moreover, our text asserts that this their blessedness is visible to others, even to all who know them. We proceed therefore to inquire,

II. Whence it is that all who know them acknowledge this—

The world at large do not know them^f: they stand at so great a distance from the Lord's people, that they cannot properly be said to “*see*” them: and hence, from the indistinctiveness of their views, they imagine that these people are either vile hypocrites or deluded enthusiasts. But those who have an opportunity of ascertaining their real character, are constrained to acknowledge them as the blessed of the Lord. This conviction is wrought on the minds of others by,

1. Their delight in God—

[Their happiness is altogether in God, even in that God and Saviour who bought them with his blood: they delight in a sense of his favour, in the enjoyment of his presence, and in the performance of his will — — — In this respect they differ from all other men on the face of the earth. Others may render unto God some external services; but the believer alone “loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity,” so as to serve him with all the powers and faculties of his soul — — — Hence there arises to the believer a peculiarity of character which elevates him above all other men, and makes it manifest that “he is of the seed which the Lord hath blessed.”]

2. Their superiority to the world—

[Believers, though *in* the world, “are not *of* it, even as Jesus Christ himself was not of the world:” they rise above its maxims, its pleasures, its interests, its honours: “they are crucified to it, and consider it as crucified to them” — — — But all other people are *of* the world: whether they live immersed in its cares, or secluded from its society, they still have their affections placed on things below, and not on things above; and, however they may pretend to despise the world,

^f 1 John iii. 1.

they are in reality its votaries, as much as if they were following it in the more accustomed way. The monk in his cell lives to himself and to the flesh, as much as the voluptuary or the man of business — — — Now here is another visible mark of distinction between the children of God and others: they may possess, and may enjoy, much of this world; but “though they use this world, they do not abuse it;” though they discharge their duties in it, they are in no respect in bondage to it: and this also elevates their character in the eyes of all who know them, and distinguishes them as pre-eminently favoured of their God.]

3. Their activity in doing good—

[Like their Divine Master, they “go about doing good.” This is, as it were, the element in which they delight to move: and, though they themselves are a very “little flock” in comparison of those around them, it will be found that almost every great and extensive charity has proceeded from them. Of the charities which relate to the souls of men and their edification in the faith of Christ, they, under God, are the sole authors: others may *contribute* to the spread of the Bible, the establishment of missions, and the promotion of religion in various ways; but the proposals that first set on foot those charities will be found, perhaps universally, to have *originated* with men of real piety. Here again they differ from all around them; for though we thankfully acknowledge that there is a considerable portion of benevolence in many who are not truly devoted to God, yet there is no real zeal in them for the diffusion of the Gospel, and the salvation of a ruined world.]

4. The whole consistency of their conduct—

[Times and circumstances make no change in them. At all times, and under all circumstances, they are glad in non-essentials to consult the weakness of others: but in things essential they are equally unmoved by hopes or fears. They know not to please men, unless it be for their good to edification. They have but one rule, the written word of God; and to that they are determined to adhere in life and death. But this is a character peculiar to them. All other persons, how pertinacious soever they may be in some things, will relax in others, according as inclination or interest may lead them. In regard to honour and probity indeed a worldly man may be as immovable as others; but in things relating either to the exercise or encouragement of vital godliness, he cannot possibly maintain a uniform tenour of conduct: he wants the principle which alone can produce a firm, uniform, and decided character: consequently where consistency in true religion is, there it will commend itself to all who are able to appreciate its value, and will stamp its possessor as a child of God.]

ADVICE—

1. Let all be ambitious to attain this honour—

[To be acknowledged as the friends and favourites of earthly monarchs were no honour at all in comparison of that which is mentioned in our text. Yet this is within the reach of all. As for that common objection, “If God has not chosen me, how can I help myself?” it is impious in the extreme^g. We have nothing to do with the decrees of God, any farther than to refer all good to him, as its true and only source: our duty is, not to dispute, but to obey: and if, in obedience to God’s command, we will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be numbered amongst his spiritual seed, and be “blessed in him with all spiritual and eternal blessings.”]

2. Let those who possess it endeavour to walk worthy of it—

[Remarkable is that exhortation of St. Paul, in his Epistle to Timothy, “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his: BUT^h, *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*” Do we profess to be of the seed which the Lord has blessed? let us shew that we are so by our conduct and conversation. If we are “sons of God, we must be blameless and harmless, shining as lights in the world, and holding forth in our conduct the word of lifeⁱ.” It is in this way only that we can approve ourselves to be God’s chosen people; and in this way only can we constrain our fellow-creatures to acknowledge the justice of our pretensions.]

^g Rom. ix. 19, 20.

^h 2 Tim. ii. 19. The word *Kai* has this meaning, in this and many other places.

ⁱ Phil. ii. 15, 16.

MVI.

THE BELIEVER CLAD WITH THE GARMENTS OF SALVATION.

Isai. lxi. 10.—*I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a Bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a Bride adorneth herself with her jewels.*

THE abruptness of this passage cannot but strike every one who reads it. But this is common in the

prophetic writings. The prophets are wont to pass over hundreds or even thousands of years, as though they were already past; and to represent as existing before their eyes, the things which shall exist at periods the most remote. It is in this way that they express their confidence in the truth of their own predictions, and encourage us also to look forward to the accomplishment of them with the fullest assurance.

The words are uttered, as it were, by the Jewish Church at the period of their conversion to Christianity. In the three first verses of this chapter the Lord Jesus Christ declares his commission to save the world^a. In the three next, the Jews, notwithstanding their desolate condition previous to that time, are assured of their participation in his benefits, being themselves restored to their own country, and converted to the faith of Christ. In the three next verses they are informed, that they shall be pre-eminently blessed, far above all that ever their nation experienced in its most favoured seasons; insomuch, that they shall be objects of admiration and envy through the whole Gentile world. These things being predicted, the Jewish Church is introduced as exulting in the actual experience of them: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God." But it is as members of the Christian Church that they use this language: and therefore without confining our attention to them, we shall consider our text as expressing,

I. The believer's boast—

To boast in any thing of our own would be absurd and impious: but to boast in God is highly becoming; as David says, "In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever^b."

The mercy vouchsafed to him is exceeding great—

[He is "clothed with the garments of salvation, and covered with a robe of righteousness," that has been formed

^a ver. 1—3. with Luke iv. 17—21.

^b Ps. xliv. 8.

for him by God himself. In the 6th verse of this chapter the Jews are informed, that “they (not the tribe of Levi only, but their whole nation) shall be named the priests of the Lord, and the ministers of their God.” Now for the priests there were certain garments appointed, wherein they were to minister, especially the linen ephod; which was intended to intimate to them the purity that became their high office. For the high priest there were some other “garments for glory and for beauty^c.” In reference to these it is that the believer says, “He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation;” for every believer under the Christian dispensation is “a king and a priest unto his God^d :” the whole body of them are “a royal priesthood^e :” and for them a robe of righteousness is prepared, which shall be to them a garment of salvation. This robe of righteousness may be understood of that righteousness which the Lord Jesus Christ hath wrought out for his people by his own obedience unto death, and “which is unto all, and upon all, them that believe in him^f.” This is the righteousness which the Prophet Daniel speaks of as to be brought in by the Messiah^g, and which St. Paul desired to possess, “not having his own righteousness which was of the law, but the righteousness which was of God by faith in Christ^h.” It is by imparting this righteousness to the believer that “Christ is made righteousness unto himⁱ,” and that he acquires that title which is given him by all his people, “The Lord our Righteousness^k.”

But these garments of salvation may also be understood of that righteousness which the Holy Spirit imparts to all who believe in Christ. He forms them anew: he enables them to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ^l ;” or, in other words, to “put off the old man, and to put on the new, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness^m.” This is the idea which the priestly garments were more immediately intended to convey: for though they were an outward covering, they were chiefly emblematic of inward purity; in reference to which it is said, “Ye shall be unto me a *kingdom of priests*, and an *holy nation*ⁿ.” And this may well be called “a garment of salvation :” for, though it is not that which justifies us before God, it constitutes our meetness for the heavenly inheritance^o, and is that “without which no man shall see the Lord^p.”

With these garments and this robe is the believer clothed: the very moment he comes to Christ, the one is imputed to him, so that he is “accepted in the Beloved^q ;” and the other

^c Exod. xxviii. 2.

^f Rom. iii. 22.

ⁱ 1 Cor. i. 30.

^m Eph. iv. 24.

^p Heb. xii. 14.

^d Rev. i. 6.

^g Dan. ix. 24.

^k Jer. xxiii. 6.

ⁿ Exod. xix. 6.

^q Eph. i. 6.

^e 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^h Phil. iii. 9.

^l Rom. xiii. 14.

^o Col. i. 12.

is begun within him, to be progressively advanced and “perfected unto the day of Christ^s.”]

In this he may well boast—

[So far is it from being an act of presumption to boast in this, it is the believer’s duty to do so: for the Prophet Isaiah expressly says, “Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory^s.” The believer *ought* to contemplate the mercies he has received, and to acknowledge the goodness of God in conferring them upon him. If he did not give glory thus unto his God, “the very stones would cry out against him.”]

Such being the believer’s experience, we shall not wonder at,

II. His determination—

When the blessed Virgin was congratulated on the mercy vouchsafed to her, she burst forth into this devout acknowledgment, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour^t.” So every believer, reviewing the mercies conferred on him, says, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord: my soul shall be joyful in my God.” And this determination is,

1. Highly reasonable—

[Contemplate the comparison which the prophet himself institutes between the ornaments thus put on the believer, and those in which persons are wont to deck themselves at the celebration of their nuptials: for “he is covered with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.” Are they happy in the prospect of their union, and shall not he be happy in the union which has already taken place between Christ and his soul? For it is not only to *serve* his God that he is now brought, but to *enjoy* him; and *that* too in an union the most intimate and endeared that can possibly be conceived. A man and his wife are one flesh; but “he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit^u.” Nor is this union in prospect merely, but in actual existence. From the moment that the believer is clothed with the garments of salvation, he is espoused to his God: he is set apart for God; and God reserves himself, as it

^s Phil. i. 6.

^t Luke i. 46, 47.

^s Isai. xlv. 24, 25.

^u 1 Cor. vi. 17.

were, for him^x: and in due time the union will be perfected in glory. And does not this call for joy and thanksgiving? See what feelings it will create in heaven, the very instant that the period shall have arrived when the Spouse shall be presented to her Lord, to be happy for ever in more immediate fellowship with him: "A voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him both small and great. And I heard, as it were, the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth! Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and *his wife hath made herself ready*. And to her was granted, that she should be arrayed in *fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints*^y." Shall the believer then stay till he arrives in heaven before he begins his joy? No: the language of his heart and lips should be that of David; "I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall *make her boast* in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me; and let us exalt his name together^z." Thus will he not be contented with praising God himself: he will stir up all around, to join him in this delightful, this reasonable service.]

2. Most pleasing to God—

[The command of God to every Believer is, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice^a." "Let Israel rejoice in Him that made him; and the children of Zion be joyful in their king^b." Indeed it is in this way only that we can give him the honour due unto his name. It may appear as if our feeble praises were nothing: and it is true that they can add nothing to the Lord: but still it is true, that they are the tribute which he requires, and by which he considers himself as honoured: "Whoso offereth me praise, glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God^c."]

APPLICATION—

1. Let none put away this honour, as too great for them to expect—

[It is not uncommon for persons of a desponding frame to think that such privileges and blessings are not for *them*. But can any one be in a more hopeless state than the Jews? View them in any light, and say whether there is, humanly speaking, any probability of their being brought to the state described in the preceding context, and to the frame expressed

^x Hos. iii. 3.

^a Phil. iv. 4.

^y Rev. xix. 5—8.

^b Ps. cxlix. 2.

^z Ps. xxxiv. 1—3.

^c Ps. l. 23.

in our text? Yet that shall be: nor shall all the powers of darkness ever prevent it. Be strong then, and of good courage, thou desponding soul; and go unto thy God with the prayer of faith. Then, though thou hast been like the prodigal in extravagance and sin, thou shalt be clothed in the best robe that is in thy Father's house, and "be presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy^d."]

2. Let none abuse this honour to the purposes of licentiousness—

[There are those who "turn the very grace of God into licentiousness;" and who pervert the doctrine of imputed righteousness to sanction and to justify their continuance in sin. But it is a certain fact, "that Christ is never made righteousness to any man, without being made his sanctification also^e." If Christ have redeemed you by his blood, it is that you may be made "a peculiar people, zealous of good works^f." Without this inward change, all your joy and glorying will be an empty boast: and "every sacrifice which you offer to your God, will be an abomination to him^g." You well know the fate of him who presumed to sit down at the marriage supper, not having on a wedding garment: and if he, a mere guest, "was cast out into outer darkness," what must be the fate of one who should claim the privileges of the Bride herself, whilst yet she possessed not the only qualities that could endear her to the Lord? Be assured, you must be "all glorious within, and have your clothing also of wrought gold," if you would find acceptance with the King of kings, and "be brought with gladness and rejoicing to the palace" of the heavenly Bridegroom^h.]

^d Jude, ver. 24.

^e 1 Cor. i. 30.

^f Tit. ii. 14.

^g Prov. xv. 8.

^h Ps. xlv. 13—15.

MVII.

THE CONVERSION OF THE WORLD TO GOD PROMISED.

Isai. lxi. 11. *As the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to bring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.*

TRUTH when delivered in simple terms, does not so forcibly impress the mind, as when it is embodied, as it were, in some image that is visible before our eyes: for a great number of ideas are, by means of a metaphor, presented to us at once; and, having

been long familiarized to our mind, they require no stretch or intenseness of thought to bring them together; so that we view a subject, as it were, almost in its full extent, without the labour of prosecuting it in its several parts. To the great mass of mankind this species of instruction is peculiarly beneficial; because it puts the poor on an equal footing with the rich, and, in many respects, enables the illiterate peasant to comprehend truth as extensively and as accurately as the most learned philosopher. The conversion of the world, and of the Jewish nation more especially, is the subject here spoken of^a; and it is predicted as resembling the spring season, wherein the whole face of nature is changed. Now, every one, however ignorant, beholds this change, and is able, in a great measure, to appreciate both its extent and value; and consequently may look forward to the accomplishment of the prediction with an interest which a more laboured and extended statement might fail to excite.

Let us then consider,

I. The comparison here instituted between the natural and moral world—

In the natural world, the parts which are uncultivated present to the view a dreary and desolate wilderness; but, when brought into cultivation, they assume altogether a new appearance, producing every thing which is beautiful to the eye, or profitable for the use of man. It is necessary, however, that human agency should be employed in effecting this change: though, after all that man can do, the work is God's alone.

In these four particulars the comparison may well be traced.

Barren beyond expression are the countries that are destitute of spiritual cultivation—

^a If it were a *Sermon for the Jews* (to whom the passage primarily refers), the reference to them should be made somewhat more prominent in the discourse.

[What is the very religion of such countries, but a mixture of the darkest ignorance with the most gloomy superstition? — — — And if such be their *religion*, which is under regulation and restraint, what must be their habits when subjected to no restraint? — — — A desert, or a wilderness, that brings forth nothing but briars and thorns, is but too just a picture of their state.]

But, through the Gospel of Christ, a wonderful change is wrought—

[See it in the people on the day of Pentecost; their hands were yet reeking with the Saviour's blood; yet, by the labours of a few short hours, not less than three thousand souls were "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Such is the change which the Gospel operates, wheresoever it is received into the heart^b: "instead of the brier grows up the fir-tree, and instead of the thorn grows up the myrtle-tree^c;" and the whole "desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose."]

This is effected through the instrumentality of man—

[As, in the productions of the garden and the field, it is by human labour that fertility is produced; so it is by the ministry of man that God extends to men the blessings of salvation: as it is said, "How can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how can they hear without a preacher^d?"]

The power, however, that effects it is God's alone—

[In man himself there exists no power to produce any thing that is *spiritually* good; no, "not so much as to think a good thought^e:" on the contrary, "in his heart there is nothing but evil, and *that* continually^f." The work, as far as it prevails in any man, is God's alone^g. As to him must be ascribed the glory of all the products of the earth; so must all spiritual good, in whomsoever it be found, be referred to him as its true and proper source^h. And if this be the case with respect to all the good that is *in* man, much more must it be so as it respects any good that is wrought *by* man. Even "Paul may plant, and Apollos water; but God alone can give the increaseⁱ." As far as relates to the practical efficiency even of the best means, the creature is nothing, and God is all^k.]

^b Col. i. 6.

^c Isai. lv. 13.

^d Rom. x. 14.

^e 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^f Gen. vi. 5.

^g 2 Cor. v. 5.

^k 1 Cor. iv. 7.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iii. 6.

^k 1 Cor. iii. 7.

From the image in which the prediction is conveyed, let us turn to,

II. The change itself, which is predicted in it—

The passage primarily belongs to the Jews; and declares, as the whole preceding and following contexts do, their restoration to God, to the admiration and astonishment of the whole world. We need not, however, confine it to them¹; but may contemplate generally,

1. The change described—

[Behold the whole world, Jewish as well as Gentile, yea, and I must add, the Christian too; how little is there of vital and evangelical “righteousness” to be seen! — — — As for “praise,” except amongst a very small remnant of true Believers, it is never heard ascending to the throne of God. A form of godliness, indeed, is common: but such piety as existed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and such devotions as were poured forth by the holy Apostles, are rare indeed; so rare, that neither is the one seen, nor the other heard, but as a strange thing, to be gazed at with wonder, or be stigmatized as folly^m.

But it shall not be always so: for, in God’s time, righteousness shall spring up, as it were, not partially on this or that favoured spot, but simultaneously, like the verdure of the spring upon the face of the whole earth. Though the word be sown only like “an handful of corn upon the tops of the mountains, its fruit shall shake like the woods of Lebanon, and the converts be like the piles of grass that cover the earthⁿ.” “In every place, too, will incense be offered, and a pure offering” of praise and thanksgiving^o; so that earth will be an emblem, and an antepast, of heaven. Then will be realized that vision of the beloved Apostle, who “saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband^p.” For this period we look with the strongest possible assurance, even for “the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness^q.”]

2. The excellency of it—

[View this change, either as it respects *God and his honour*, or *man and his happiness*. Is it not grievous to reflect

¹ This observation, if the subject be used as a *Sermon for the Jews*, should, of course, be omitted.

^m 1 Pet. iv. 4.

ⁿ Ps. lxxii. 16.

^o Mal. i. 11.

^p Rev. xxi. 2.

^q 2 Pet. iii. 13.

that God is almost banished from this lower world; and that the Saviour, who came down from heaven to redeem it, is scarcely known, or known only to be dishonoured and blasphemed? Verily, it is a wonder that a world so lost in wickedness is not burnt up, as Sodom and Gomorrah. Indeed it would be so, but for the elect's sake. God in tender mercy spares it, because he has ordained that one day this barren fig-tree shall yield him fruit; and unnumbered millions, who shall spring from the loins of his inveterate foes, shall rise "a new creation," and "be to him for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory, to all eternity."

And how blessed will this change be to our fallen race! At present, men are but miserable creatures, full of evil passions, "hateful in themselves, and hating all around them^r;" yea, filled also with terrible forebodings in relation to their eternal state. But then, freed from the bonds of sin and the apprehensions of death, and living in the enjoyment of God's presence and in the prospect of his glory, they will go on their way rejoicing. Every day will bring them an augmentation of bliss, and be, as it were, a prelude of eternal felicity. Not that this blessedness shall then commence on earth: no; it is already experienced by thousands, who can bear their testimony, that, both in respect of holiness and happiness, they have known a transition, great as from the wintry aspect of a desolate wilderness to the vernal beauty of a highly-cultivated garden.

Such is the change which is now fast approaching; and such is "the work of God's hands, wherein he will ere long be glorified" throughout the earth^s.]

SEE then, Beloved,

1. What you should seek for yourselves—

[Look for such a change to be wrought in *your* hearts. *This* is conversion: *this* is salvation begun in the soul: *this* is the indispensable requisite for the enjoyment of heaven. Cast your eyes around you, and see the face of nature now, as contrasted with its appearance during the winter months: you see it; you admire it; you enjoy it. O! let the great Husbandman behold this blessed change in you! Let not the showers of grace, which he pours forth around you, and the rays of the Sun of Righteousness, which he causes to shine upon you, be received in vain: for then will you only bring down the heavier curse upon your souls, as the Apostle Paul has warned you: "The earth that drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth briers and thorns is rejected, and is nigh unto

^r Tit. iii. 3.

^s Isai. lx. 21.

cursing: whose end is, to be burned." Pray rather to God, that his Holy Spirit may be poured out upon you, as "rain upon the mown grass^t;" and that your beloved Saviour may "come down into your souls, as into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits^u." And be not contented with any measure of fruitfulness which at any time you may have attained: but, if there be the blade, look for the ear; and if there be the ear, look for the full corn in the ear^x;" that "you may be trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord; and that he may be glorified."^y

2. What you should desire for the world at large—

[Take for your prayer these words of the prophet: "Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation; and let righteousness spring up together^y." You have abundant encouragement to address your God in these terms, because he has absolutely promised that the event predicted shall be accomplished: "The wilderness and the solitary place *shall* be glad for them; and the desert *shall* rejoice, and blossom as the rose: it *shall* blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon *shall* be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; they *shall* see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God^z." Shall such prospects be opened to us, and we feel no desire to have them realized? Let us be ashamed that we can be so regardless of God's honour, and so indifferent about the salvation of our fellow-men. And, whilst we pray to God to effect this great work, let us, according to our respective abilities, be "fellow-workers with him;" and never rest till "the wilderness become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest^a."]

^t Ps. lxxii. 6.

^u Cant. iv. 16.

^x Mark iv. 28.

^y Isai. xlv. 8.

^z Isai. xxxv. 1, 2.

^a Isai. xxxii. 15.

MVIII.

THE CHURCH A ROYAL DIADEM.

Isai. lxii. 3. *Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God.*

IT was promised to our blessed Lord, that, "when he should have made his soul an offering for sin, he should see a seed, who should prolong their days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands." These promises are to be fulfilled in the

conversion of souls to him: and then only will they be fully accomplished, when all the kingdoms of the world are his, and when the entire Church, both of Jews and Gentiles, shall be “a crown of glory, and a royal diadem in his hand.” In another part of his writings, the prophet says, that “Jehovah shall in that day be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty unto the residue of his people^a.” And *that* appears an expression suited to the occasion. But the language of our text seems altogether inexplicable. That *God* should be “a crown of glory” to *us*, as adding glory to us, and crowning us with loving-kindness and tender mercies, is conceivable enough; but that *we* should be a royal diadem to *him*, is utterly inconceivable. Yet so it is: and the declaration of it to us will lead me to shew,

I. In what estimation God holds his Church and people—

To form a just idea of this subject, we must consider in what light an earthly monarch views his crown; and then transfer to Jehovah those feelings, as far as they will comport with the holiness of his Nature, and the dignity of his divine Majesty.

God regards, then, his Church,

1. As an emblem of his power—

[Crowns and sceptres are generally used as emblems of royalty, and as bearing witness to the power of Him who is invested with them. Now God's Church and people are precisely such “witnesses for him.” The works of creation indeed testify of his eternal power and Godhead, and *that* in terms that are intelligible to all^b: but the new creation of his people speaks no less strongly on this subject. By sin, they are fallen from the image in which they were first created, and are transformed into the very likeness of Satan himself. Now, to repair these ruins, to cancel, in consistency with God's perfections, the guilt that has been contracted, to purge away all the pollution with which the soul is defiled, to impress again upon it the divine image, and to render it meet for the enjoyment of God himself in heaven, is confessedly a work which no finite imagination could ever have contemplated. But God has wrought it: he has wrought it for every individual of his

^a Isai. xxviii. 5.

^b Rom. i. 19, 20.

Church and people : and this it is, which, in the judgment of the angelic host, brings "glory to God in the highest." It is this in which "the exceeding greatness of his power, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead," is pre-eminently displayed^c; and this proclaims him, throughout the whole universe to be "King of kings, and Lord of lords."]

2. As a monument of his love—

[Nothing does a monarch behold with more complacency than his crown. And with what delight does God behold his Church and people, whom he accounts "his peculiar treasure^d," his most inestimable "jewels^e!" "He has chosen them in Christ from before the foundation of the world, and predestinated them to be to the praise of the glory of his grace^f:" and he delights in them in that peculiar view; as says the Prophet Zephaniah: "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty: he will save: he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing^g."]

3. As an object of his peculiar care—

[Were his crown menaced, and a confederacy formed to wrest it from him, a monarch would exert himself to the uttermost to defend it. And what will not Jehovah do for the preservation of his Church and people? He has declared that "neither the power nor the policy of hell shall ever prevail against them^h;" that "none shall ever pluck them out of his handsⁱ;" but that "they shall be kept by the power of God unto everlasting salvation^k." They are in *the palm* of his hand^l, *held fast* by him, against all the efforts of their enemies. "Lest any should hurt them, he keeps them night and day^m;" nor shall the least jewel of his crown be found wanting in itⁿ. How determined he is to keep them, may be seen by his own gracious declarations in the Prophet Jeremiah: "I will rejoice over them, to do them good; and I will plant them in this land assuredly, with my whole heart, and with my whole soul^o." "They are to him for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory^p;" and he will never suffer so much as one of them to perish^q.]

^c Eph. i. 19, 20. Perhaps in no book upon earth will there be found more energetic language than this is in the original.

^d Exod. xix. 5, 6. Ps. cxxxv. 4.

^e Mal. iii. 17.

^f Eph. i. 4—6.

^g Zeph. iii. 17.

^h Matt. xvi. 18.

ⁱ John x. 28, 29.

^k 1 Pet. i. 5.

^l See Vitringa in loc.

^m Isai. xxvii. 3.

ⁿ Amos ix. 9.

^o Jer. xxxii. 41.

^p Jer. xliii. 11.

^q Matt. xviii. 14.

Seeing, then, that God esteems his people so highly, we may perceive,

II. The interest which we also, from this consideration, should take in their welfare—

They should undoubtedly be dear to *us*. We should take a lively interest in,

1. The Church at large—

[We are taught, in our daily prayers, to make this a leading petition, “Thy kingdom come.” And we should not only desire it, but labour to promote it to the utmost of our power. We should labour in it *for the world’s sake*. Who would not wish that the wretched bond-slaves of Satan should be rescued from his dominion, and be brought into the liberty of God’s dear children? It matters not whether they belong to the civilized or uncivilized world; for with God “there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free; but Christ is all, and in all.” The meanest Hottentot, who is brought to the knowledge of Christ, is made a jewel in the Redeemer’s crown, and is not a whit less dear to him than the greatest monarch upon earth. And should we account any labour too great, if peradventure we may be instruments in God’s hands to “pluck brands out of the burning,” and to form them as pillars for the temple of our God; or to wrest jewels from Satan’s crown, and polish them for the crown of our Redeemer? I say, the man who pants not to help forward such offices of love as these, has yet to learn wherein true love consists.

And should we not engage in this work *for our Redeemer’s sake*? Has he left his throne in glory for us, and submitted to death, even the accursed death upon the cross, for us? and shall we feel no zeal for his glory? Shall we be indifferent, whether he ever “see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied?” The prospect of bringing many sons to glory was “the joy set before him, for which he endured the cross and despised the shame, till he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God’s.” And shall we be indifferent, whether he ever attain that joy? Even the honour of having “men as *our own* joy and crown of rejoicing” in the latter day^t, might well be a sufficient stimulus to our exertion in their behalf: but, to gather them as jewels for the Redeemer’s crown, jewels in whom he shall be glorified to all eternity, should be regarded by us as the most honourable office that can be sustained, the most delightful work in which it is possible to be engaged.]

^r Col. iii. 11.

^s Heb. xii. 2.

^t 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

2. The Jewish Church in particular—

[It is of them that the prophet speaks in the whole context, and to them chiefly that the words in my text refer. They were God's chosen people from the beginning; even from the moment that God called Abraham their father, and entered into covenant with him. It was to them that he revealed himself as *their* God in a more eminent and peculiar way than he was of any other people: and in them has he been more glorified than in the whole world besides. Though they are under his displeasure, scattered over the face of the whole earth, yet are they preserved in a way that no other people have ever been; and are kept for the express purpose, that his glory may again be displayed in them, far beyond what it has been at any former period of their existence. It is at the period of their destined conversion that they are to be "a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God." This is plainly declared by the Lord himself: "I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them as at the first: and I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me. And *it shall be to me a name of joy*, a praise, and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them^u." Hence are we called to be fellow-workers with God in their conversion. For Zion's sake we should not hold our peace; and for Jerusalem's sake we should not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth." To this period God himself looks forward, even as a bridegroom to the day of his nuptials; saying, "As a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons (who build up the families of their ancestors) marry thee; and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee^x." At that period, through the labours of God's people^y, shall the attention of the whole world be directed to them^z, and men "shall call them, The holy people, the redeemed of the Lord, a people sought out, a city not forsaken^a." Say then, Brethren, whether we should not, both by secret prayers and public exertions, labour, all of us, according to our respective abilities, to hasten forward this glorious day, when "that people, hated and despised as they have been, shall become an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations," the branch of God's planting, the work of his hands, in which he shall be glorified^b? Yes: "we should not hold our peace day nor night." "O ye that make mention

^u Jer. xxxiii. 7—9.

^x ver. 1, 5.

^y ver. 10.

^z ver. 11.

^a ver. 12.

^b Isai. lx. 15, 21.

of the Lord," and profess to serve him, in the name of Almighty God I say to you, "keep not silence, and give God no rest, till he establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth^c!"]

As a further IMPROVEMENT of this subject, I wish you particularly to observe,

1. What obligations we are under to look well to our ways—

[Every true Believer is a jewel in the Redeemer's crown. And does it become persons so honoured to be regardless of their ways? Should we not rather be studious, "as sons of God, to be blameless and harmless in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, shining as lights in the world, holding forth in the whole of our conversation the word of life^d?" I call upon you, Brethren, to remember what a conspicuous place you are ordained to fill to all eternity; and to "walk worthy of your high calling," yea, "and worthy of the Lord himself too, unto all pleasing:" and however bright you already shine, "let your path shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."]

2. What encouragement we have to labour for the Lord—

[It is no worthless object that we have in view. What if we be not able to labour on an extended scale? If, in the course of our whole lives, we can add but one jewel to Jehovah's crown, we shall have effected, both for God and man, a work that is superior in value to the whole world. See, then, whether God may not enable you to effect this in behalf of a parent or child, a brother or sister, a friend or servant, a neighbour, or some person in a state of deep affliction. It is not human skill that is requisite, like that which is necessary to prepare stones for an earthly crown: the speaking of a word for God, and in dependence upon him, may, through his blessing, accomplish this glorious undertaking. And, O! how rich a recompence would one single instance of success be for the labours of our whole life! If, indeed, we are able to extend our labours to the very ends of the earth, let us account it our highest privilege to do so. Let us, "for the joy that is set before us, endure any cross, and despise any shame," even as our Lord and Saviour did, if, peradventure, we may prepare "a crown of rejoicing" for ourselves^e, and "a crown of glory" for our God.]

^c ver. 6, 7.

^d Phil. ii. 15, 16.

^e Phil. iv. 1.

MIX.

GOD'S DELIGHT IN HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. lxii. 5. *As a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee : and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee^a.*

AMONGST those who have paid attention to the sacred Oracles, no doubt exists but that very glorious days are near at hand, even those days when “ the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the seas.” In this conversion of the world to God, the Jewish people will take the lead : “ their righteousness will go forth as brightness, and their salvation as a lamp that burneth : and the Gentiles shall see their righteousness, and all kings their glory : and they shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name^b!” In them shall God be pre-eminently glorified: for “ they shall be as a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God^c.” At present they are in a state proverbially “ desolate,” as indeed they have been for nearly eighteen hundred years : but the time is coming when “ their nation shall no more be termed Forsaken, nor their land be any more termed Desolate ; but she shall be called Hephzi-bah ; and her land Beulah ; for the Lord delighteth in her, and her land shall be married^d :” and God's delight in her shall be such as we have just now heard in the words of our text.

With all the caution due to so delicate a subject, let us consider,

I. God's relation to his people—

The words primarily relate to the Jewish Church—

[God had called them from the most destitute condition, even that of a new-born infant, that had no one to administer to its necessities ; and had separated them for himself, to be brought, in due season, into the most intimate and endeared

^a In treating this subject, *the utmost possible delicacy* must be observed.

^b ver. 1, 2. with chap. lx. 1—5. ^c ver. 3. ^d ver. 4.

relation to himself^e. "To himself he betrothed her, in loving-kindness and tender mercies, and in unchanging faithfulness^f:" and he assumed to himself the title and character of her Husband: "Thy Maker is thine Husband: the Lord of Hosts is his name^g." Yea, notwithstanding her unfaithfulness to him, he still acknowledges her as standing to him in the relation of a Wife: "Turn, O backsliding children! saith the Lord; for I am married unto you^h." True, at present she is "forsaken and desolate:" but soon shall she be *restored*, agreeably to the prophetic declaration in my text: "As a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons (or, as Bishop Lowth translates it, thy *Restorer*) marry thee." If we retain our present translation, we must remember, that persons, *considered as born in the Church*, are her "sons;" but, *as uniting themselves to the Church*, are her husband; and consequently the appellation, which in one point of view would be incongruous, may be admitted in the other view, especially in the high flights of Eastern poetryⁱ. If we take Bishop Lowth's translation, not only will the metaphor be more just, but the unity of the whole passage will be preserved; God being the Bridegroom, who both takes the Church into union with himself, and rejoices over her as his Bride.

This event we look for at no distant period, when "those whom God has for a small moment repudiated, as a wife of youth, shall be gathered with great mercies, and be restored as in the days of old^k, and live in most endeared communion with him for evermore^l."

But the text may be fitly applied, also, to the Church of Christ—

[Christ is called the "Bridegroom," of his Church^m. To him has "every member of the Church been espoused as to a husband, and been presented as a chaste virginⁿ. And so manifest is this relation between him and his people, that St. Paul, speaking expressly on the duties of husbands and wives, turns, and, with a most unlooked-for application of the subject, says, "This is a great mystery; for I speak concerning Christ and his Church^o." The same Apostle, in another of his Epistles, enters very particularly into the subject; representing us as formerly "married to the law; but now, our

^e Ezek. xvi. 4—8.

^f Hos. ii. 19, 20.

^g Isai. liv. 5.

^h Jer. iii. 14.

ⁱ Such a confusion, or rather such a bold combination of metaphors is not uncommon in the inspired writings. See Eph. ii. 19, 20. "*fellow-citizens*," "*built*."

^k Isai. liv. 6—10.

^l Ezek. xxxvi. 24, 28. ^m John iii. 29.

ⁿ 2 Cor. xi. 2.

^o Eph. v. 31, 32.

former husband being dead, as united to another husband, even Christ; in order that, by grace derived from him, we may bring forth fruit unto God^p." Even to all eternity will this relation to him be acknowledged: for to St. John an angel from heaven said, "Come hither, and I will shew thee the Bride, the Lamb's Wife^q."

Behold then, Brethren, what an honour is here held out to us, that we may aspire after it, and attain it! What would a woman, in the lowest ranks of life, think of such a proposal coming to her from a king or prince? Would it excite no feelings in her mind? Would she pass it by, as a common thing, in which she had no interest? Would it not rather be made a subject of deep and serious reflection? Let us then, my Brethren, realize the idea that the offer is now made to us; and that nothing but an obstinate refusal on our part can prevent the completion of this great object, a marriage-union with our God.]

In perfect accordance with this sublime mystery is that which is here added, respecting,

II. His delight in them—

There is no earthly joy superior to that which a bridegroom feels on his wedding day, in the presence of his bride—

[Now all his wishes are accomplished. Whatever fears or anxieties may have filled his breast during the period of his attendance on her, he now finds them all entirely dispelled; and rejoices over his bride as his own peculiar property, in the possession of whom all his happiness is centered, and in whose beloved society he hopes to spend the remainder of his days on earth.]

Now, such is God's delight in the objects of his choice—

[Over the Jewish Church he greatly rejoiced, according to what he spake by the prophet, "Behold! I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy^r." Nothing can exceed the language of the Prophet Zephaniah to this effect: "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save; he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing^s." Nor is this a mere feeling in his bosom, but an active and efficient principle; as says the Prophet Jeremiah: "I will rejoice over them to do them good; and I will plant them in this land assuredly, with my whole

^p Rom. vii. 4.

^r Isai. lxv. 18, 19.

^q Rev. xxi. 9.

^s Zeph. iii. 17.

heart, and with my whole soul^t." And such also is his joy over all his chosen people: "He delights in them^u," and "manifests himself unto them^x," and maintains the most intimate communion with them^y. He has prevailed over them, and in the day of his power has made them willing to surrender up themselves to him: and when he sees how entire their hearts are with him, "they having for him forgotten their own people and their father's house, he greatly desires their beauty^z," and gives himself to them, as their God and portion for ever. Yes, "*Because they have set their love upon him*, therefore will he deliver them; he will set them on high, because they have known his name. They shall call upon him, and he will answer them: he will be with them in trouble; he will deliver them, and honour them. With long life will he satisfy them, and will shew them his salvation^a."

1. Let all, then, desire this high honour—

[To get advancement in this world, is universally considered as a most desirable attainment. But what connexion can be compared with that proposed to us in the text; or what elevation is worthy of a thought in comparison of it? — — — Will any say, 'Alas! it is unattainable by *me*. I am so far off from God, that there can be no hope of my ever being brought into such a relation to him'? I answer, Who are farther off from him than the Jews? or who, according to human appearance, are so unlikely ever to have the text fulfilled to them as they? Yet of *them* are these things spoken, and to *them* shall they be fulfilled; and therefore every other person in the universe may assure himself, that, "if only he come to God in the Saviour's name, he shall on no account be cast out^b." The person who seems to have most reason to despond, is he, who, after having once given himself to God, has departed from him: but to such does God expressly say, "If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord^c." To all then I say, without exception, "Return unto the Lord; and," however base your departures from him have been, "he will heal your backslidings, and love you freely^d."]

2. Let those who profess to stand in this near relation to their God, walk worthy of it—

[What advice would any of you give to a beloved daughter, on the day of her nuptials, especially if she had been taken

^t Jer. xxxii. xi. 20.

^u Prov. xi. 20.

^x John xiv. 21.

^y 1 John i. 3.

^z Ps. xlv. 10, 11.

^a Ps. xci. 14—16.

^b John vi. 37.

^c Jer. iii. 1.

^d Jer. iii. 22.

from a state of the lowest degradation, and united to one most exalted both in rank and piety? Such is the advice which I would give to you. Stand at the remotest distance from all your former habits and associates. Get your mind, your habits, *your very taste*, assimilated to the mind of your divine Husband. “Be altogether for him, and for him alone^e.” Be as much his, in every faculty of your souls, as you desire that he should be yours in all his glorious perfections. Would you that his love should pre-eminently distinguish you; his power be exerted for you; and his faithfulness towards you be unchangeable? Be ye such towards him, according to the utmost extent of your powers; loving him above all; knowing no will but his; seeking nothing but his honour; and living only for his glory. Thus live with him on earth; and fear not but that your bliss shall be consummated in heaven for evermore. Some interruptions to your joy may occur on earth: but in heaven it shall be without alloy or intermission or end. When once you come to the Zion that is above, “everlasting joy shall be upon your heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away^f.”]

^e Hos. iii. 3.^f Isai. xxxv. 10.

MX.

DUTY OF INTERCEDING FOR THE CHURCH.

Isai. lxii. 6, 7. *I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night; ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence; and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.*

IT is melancholy to reflect, that notwithstanding God has given a revelation of himself to man above three thousand years, there is not a sixth part of mankind that has ever so much as heard of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. And, of those who are called Christians, a very small portion indeed has any vital union with Christ, or experimental knowledge of his love. In this view, even the Church itself may be termed Forsaken and Desolate. But it will not be always thus. There is a period fixed in the Divine counsels, when the Jewish Church, being enlarged by vast accessions from every quarter of the globe, shall be called Hephzi-bah, and Beulah; seeing

that the Lord will delight in her, and regard her as his Bride^a.

To the hastening forward of that blessed time we all *may* contribute, and all *ought* to contribute to the utmost of our power. How we may be instrumental to the glorious work, we are told in the words before us: in considering which we shall shew,

I. What should be the great object of our solicitude—

As having immortal souls, we are all concerned in the first place to seek salvation for ourselves. But our anxiety should extend to the Jewish Church, and to the whole world: we should desire not only to prosper in our own souls, but to see “Jerusalem,” even the Church of the living God, prospering also, so as to be “a praise in the earth.” In a word, our desire should be,

1. That the *light* of the Gospel should be universally *diffused*—

[In the Gospel is contained the brightest discovery of all the Divine perfections as united and harmonizing in the work of Redemption: it is an exhibition of “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” — — —

Now, in comparison of this, the works of creation have no glory, by reason of the glory that excelleth: the sun itself is darkness when compared with “the Sun of Righteousness that hath arisen on the world with healing in his wings” — — —

And where, but in the Church, is this glory seen? Not one ray of it shines in the whole world besides — — —

The Church then is “a praise in the earth,” in proportion as this light shines forth in the earth: But alas! at present the greatest part of the world is under an eclipse. We hope, however, that in due time every intervening object will be removed; and that the light now rapidly spreading over the horizon, will extend its beams to regions that are yet lying in darkness and the shadow of death; and that it will shine, in its meridian splendour, not successively, but at once, on every portion of the habitable globe.

How greatly is this to be desired! If the light of civilization be esteemed a blessing, how much more must the light of Salvation be so; especially when, with that, the glory of God and of all his infinite perfections is displayed! — — —]

^a ver. 4, 5.

2. That the *efficacy* of the Gospel should be universally *experienced*—

[In two views especially is the efficacy of the Gospel seen, namely, in comforting, and sanctifying all who embrace it. To what unspeakable comfort it raises an afflicted soul, is declared at large by the Prophet Isaiah^b; — — — as its sanctifying power is by the Prophet Jeremiah^c: — — — and in both views it is “for a name of joy, a praise, and an honour, before all the nations of the earth^d.” Its effect is uniformly to change a wilderness into a fertile garden^e; and to fill with the choicest shrubs the ground that was covered only with briers and thorns^f. Conceive this change effected in any place, What honour must accrue to that which causes the change, and what blessedness to the place where such a change is seen! Would not such a spot be as Goshen in the midst of Egypt? Such then is the Church, wherever the Gospel comes in its power; and such will the Church be in the whole earth, when once it shall have attained its destined extent and eminence. And is not this an object to be desired by all? Truly, if we have one spark of love to our fellow-creatures, or of zeal for God, we should look forward to that event as the consummation and completion of all our wishes.]

That object, then, being so desirable, let us consider,

II. In what way we should all endeavour to promote it—

All may be instrumental in helping it forward :

1. Ministers—

[They are “watchmen set on the walls of Jerusalem,” and are commanded “not to hold their peace day nor night.” In this expression there may possibly be a reference to those under the law, who ministered in the sanctuary by night as well as by day^g. Whether their “not holding their peace,” refers to any public addresses, which, under the Gospel, are to be made from day to day by those who sustain the office of the ministry, we do not certainly know: but we are sure that it comprehends at least, if it do not exclusively relate to, the great work of intercession; in which ministers ought exceedingly to abound. Whatever personal efforts they may make, they can do no good, if God himself do not interpose to make their work effectual: “Paul may plant, and Apollos water; but

^b Isai. lxi. 1—3.

^c Jer. xxxiii. 6—8.

^d Jer. xxxiii. 9.

^e Isai. xxxv. 1, 2. and li. 3.

^f Isai. lv. 13.

^g Ps. cxxxiv. 1.

God alone can give the increase." Ministers must pray, yea, must continue instant in prayer "night and day," if they would be successful in their ministrations^h.]

2. People of every description—

[All who "make mention of the Lord" are bidden to intercede for the Church of God. But in the marginal translation those words are rendered "All the Lord's Remembrancers." This is the character which we are all to bear: God says, "Put me in remembranceⁱ." We are to remind him of all his gracious promises, just as Jacob did^k, and, like Jacob, to wrestle with him till we prevail: yea, in the confidence of success we should say, like him, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me^l." This is frequently inculcated in the New Testament: the example of the Canaanitish woman, and the parable of the importunate widow, are intended to shew us, that we should "pray and not faint," and that God will hear "those who pray day and night unto him, though he bear long with them^m."

Now, though we are not to imagine that there is any reluctance in God to bless his Church, yet we are to persevere in prayer exactly as if we hoped to prevail by dint of importunity; yea, we are to "*give God himself no rest*," till he arise and execute the desired work. In this way the lowest Christian in the world may render more service to the Church of God, than either ministers or princes can in any other way: a human arm, however active or powerful, can put forth only a small measure of strength; but prayer can call Omnipotence to its aid, and effect whatever is necessary for the Church's welfare. Whilst the success of Elijah remains written for our instructionⁿ, no man has any right to ask, What can such a weak creature as I effect for the Church of God?]

This SUBJECT affords ample matter,

1. For reproof—

[How little have any of us considered the duty, and the efficacy of intercession! Instead of praying day and night for the conversion of the Jews, and the enlargement of the Christian Church, many of us find it difficult even to pray for ourselves: and are well content that God should "rest," and that the world, both of Jews and Gentiles, should perish in their sins, provided that we ourselves may be excused the trouble of exertion, and finally escape the wrath of God. Who amongst us does not blush at a review of his conduct in relation to this matter? Who, instead of fulfilling his duty as God's Remembrancer,

^h Compare Acts xx. 31. with 1 Thess. iii. 10. and 2 Tim. i. 3.

ⁱ Isai. xliii. 26. ^k Gen. xxxii. 12. ^l Gen. xxxii. 24—26.

^m Matt. xv. 22—28. and Luke xviii. 1—8. ⁿ Jam. v. 16—18.

does not himself need a remembrancer to remind him of his duty? Let this matter be duly considered amongst us; and let us no longer, like Jonah, be indulging in sleep, when a whole world of sinners is calling for our utmost exertions^o.]

2. For encouragement—

[The first verse of this chapter deserves particular attention: it is spoken by the same person that speaks in our text: it is Christ himself, or, at least, the prophet in his name, who says, “For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.” Now here is the very point which we ought supremely to desire, *the conversion of the Jews, and the consequent conversion of the whole world: THIS is the true import of that expression, “Jerusalem being a praise in the earth”*——— Does God then fix his eye upon *this* glorious object? and shall not *we*? Is *he* constantly intent upon it? and shall not *we*? Is he determined in his own mind to take no rest till he has accomplished it? and shall not *we* be encouraged to pray to him respecting it? If he were averse to it, we might despair of ever prevailing upon him to change his mind: but when we know how entirely his own mind is bent upon it, and that he is ordering every thing both in providence and grace with a view to it, we may well besiege the throne of grace, to remind him of his promises. Let us take courage then, and plead, if peradventure we may hasten forward the glorious day, and see, if not in the world at large, yet at least in our own immediate circle, Jerusalem to be indeed “a praise in the earth.”]

^o Jonah i. 5, 6.

MXI.

RESTORATION OF THE JEWS.

Isai. lxii. 10—12. *Go through, go through the gates: prepare ye the way of the people: cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people. Behold, the Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord; and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken.*

TRULY wonderful is the power of faith: it looks through hundreds and thousands of years; and not only anticipates events as future, but sets them before

the mind as present. In the prophetic writings this assured faith is frequently exhibited. The Prophet Isaiah in particular seems to have been endued with it in a pre-eminent degree. He rarely mentions the conversion either of Jews or Gentiles to the faith of Christ, but he represents it as already passing before his eyes: "Lift up thine eyes round about," says he, "and see" these prophecies already accomplishing throughout the world. "Who are these that I behold flying as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows^a?" In the chapter before us God had declared, that "he would not rest till he had caused the righteousness of his Church to go forth as brightness, and its salvation as a lamp that burneth^b." And this promise he had confirmed with an oath^c. To this word and this oath the prophet gave such perfect and assured credit, that he addressed the Jews above a hundred years before they were carried captive to Babylon, as if they were already at the close of their captivity, and ready to be restored to their own land: "Go through, go through the gates," for the purpose of returning to your own country. At the same time he looks forward also to the Jews in their present state of dispersion, and bids them receive their Messiah as already come for their deliverance; assuring them at the same time, that in returning to God through Him, they shall be restored to all the privileges which, by their rejection of him, they have forfeited.

His address to them sets forth in a very animated point of view the circumstances that shall take place at the time of their restoration;

I. The preparation to be made for them—

The former part of the address is directed immediately to them. As at the time of Cyrus's decree vast multitudes needed to be stirred up to avail themselves of the permission granted them to return to their own country, so now, when the gates are opened to them, they need repeated exhortations,

^a Isai. xlix. 18. and lx. 4, 8. ^b ver. 1. ^c ver. 8, 9.

“Go through, go through the gates.” God says to them, “Go ye forth of Babylon; flee ye from the Chaldeans; with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The Lord hath redeemed his servant Jacob^d.” “Depart ye; for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rereward^e.”

The remainder of the address is directed to all who have it in their power to facilitate their return. Here therefore we may see our duty towards them. We should without delay exert ourselves in their behalf:

1. We should prepare their way before them—

[As, previous to the advent of our Lord himself, a Messenger was sent before him “to prepare *his* way, and to make *his* paths straight^f,” so God commands that we should “prepare the way of *the people*,” whom he has scattered over the face of the whole earth. In order to facilitate their access to their own land, and to the heavenly Jerusalem, we should “gather out the stones,” “the stumbling-blocks” which lie in their way^g; and “cast up an highway” over those morasses, which present an almost insuperable obstacle to their return. If it be asked, What are these stumbling-blocks, and these morasses? I answer, One stumbling-block is, the ungodly lives of Christians; which give the Jews but too much reason to conclude that our religion is not a whit better than their own. Another stumbling-block is, The contempt with which we have treated them, and which cannot but have incensed them against, not the followers only, but even the very name, of Christ. The divisions of the Christian Church present also a very serious obstacle in their way: and we should do all in our power to heal these divisions, so that, if there still remain a *diversity of sentiment* on points of doubtful disputation, there may at least be an *union of heart* amongst all “who hold fast the Head,” and who, we have reason to hope, are living members of Christ’s mystical body. Till they see some change in *our conduct* in these respects, we can scarcely hope to prevail upon them to embrace *our principles*, however strongly we may recommend and enforce them.]

2. We should “lift up the standard” of the cross to them—

^d Isai. xlviii. 20.

^e Isai. lii. 11, 12.

^f Isai. xl. 3—5, with Luke iii. 4—6.

^g Isai. lvii. 14.

[That is the standard which must be erected for the Gentile world^h, and to that the Jewish people also must resortⁱ. Under that must all mankind be marshalled^k, and come up to Zion^l. But how shamefully negligent have the Christian world been now for so many centuries, in not unfurling these banners to them, and endeavouring to enlist them into the service of our Lord! Never till lately have our Scriptures been translated into their language for their use; nor has ever any great and general effort been made to promote their conversion to the faith of Christ. It is only in a way of pains and penalties that they have been dealt with hitherto, and not in a way of kind instruction and affectionate admonition. But till this be done, what prospect is there of their conversion to the faith of Christ? Suitable means must be used: and I beg it to be particularly noticed, that *God enjoins these means to be used, in order to the effecting of his gracious purposes towards them.* Let not any one imagine that the Jews are to be converted in any other way than the Gentiles were. There were miracles in the Apostolic age: but they were to aid, and not to supersede, the labours of men. So there *may* possibly be miracles in the Millennial age: but it is by instruction alone that the Jews can be brought to a knowledge of the Gospel, and to faith in Christ as the true Messiah.]

To these general directions the prophet more distinctly adds,

II. The proclamation to be reported to them—

It has been thought by some, that we are under no obligation to seek the conversion of the Jews. But, not to mention the general order given to ministers to go forth and preach the Gospel to *every creature*, (which must include Jews as well as Gentiles,) here is in our text an express command, *a proclamation from Almighty God himself, to the whole Gentile world*, to say unto the *Daughter of Zion*, “Behold, thy salvation cometh!” Let not this be forgotten: it is binding upon every one of us: and, if we disregard the injunction, we disregard it at our peril. We are here directed to make known to them, by every possible means,

1. The Saviour’s advent—

[The true character of the Messiah is here declared: He is a Saviour: He is “salvation” itself; even the salvation of

^h Isai. xi. 10.

^k Zech. xiv. 9.

ⁱ Isai. xi. 11, 12.

^l Mic. iv. 1.

all who trust in him. "His reward is with him;" and it shall be conferred on all who receive him in faith and love. Who can depict the blessings which he will bring to the believing soul? They are such as "no eye ever saw, no ear ever heard, no heart ever adequately conceived." "The peace" with which he will invest the soul, "passeth all understanding;" "the joy" with which he will inspire it, is "unspeakable;" and the "riches" with which he will endow it, are "unsearchable." Let the believer, though but of the lowest class, be appealed to, and he will confirm this truth from his own experience. Moreover, "his work is before him;" and he will never leave it till it be fully accomplished. In the days of his flesh, he rested not till he could say, "It is finished:" nor will he rest now till he has fulfilled all that he has undertaken, and brought every one of his elect to glory. "Of those that were given him of the Father, he never lost one, nor will ever suffer one to be plucked out of his hands."

All this is to be made known to the Jewish people. They should be informed what a Saviour there is: we should bring to their ears these glad tidings, "lifting up our voice with strength, and saying to all the cities of Judah, Behold your God^m!"]

2. The benefits he will confer upon them—

[Desolate indeed is their condition at present: but it shall not be always so: the time is coming when they shall "no more be termed, Forsaken;" but shall be restored to all the honours and blessings which they once possessed. Once they were "an holy people to the Lord their God, even a special people above all upon the face of the earth^o;" and "high above them all, in praise, and in name, and in honour^p." And such shall they again become, when they unite in "seeking the Lord their God, and David their king^q." As partakers of his mercies in common with the Gentile world, they will be called, "The redeemed of the Lord;" but with an emphasis peculiar to themselves will they be termed, "Sought out, and not forsaken." They appear to be forsaken at present: but it shall then appear, that God's eye was upon them for good even in the midst of their deepest humiliation; and efforts shall be made for their recovery, which shall distinguish them pre-eminently as objects of his love, whom he has "*sought out*" with care, and brought home with joy.]

Such are the encouraging statements to be made to them; and such statements in God's good time shall be effectual for the bringing of them home in triumph to their God.]

^m Isai. xl. 9.

^p Deut. xxvi. 19.

ⁿ ver. 4.

^q Hos. iii. 5.

^o Deut. vii. 6.

That I may not overlook the personal interests of those to whom I speak, let me in CONCLUSION say,

1. Take care that you experience these things in your own souls—

[In your natural and unconverted state, you are as far off from God as the Jews themselves. You are “in a world that lieth under the power of the wicked one^r,” and you need to come out from it, as much as they did from Babylon^s — — — You need also to have “straight paths made for your feet,” that you may advance the more easily towards the heavenly Jerusalem^t. The same encouragements too you need, in order to induce you to embrace the proffered salvation. The excellency of the Redeemer, the riches of his grace, the fullness and certainty of his salvation, need to be set before you, and the honours and glories of the eternal world held forth to your view; that so you may brave the dangers of a dreary wilderness, and seek your happiness in Zion. There is not, in fact, any thing to be done by a Jew, that is not to be done by you — — — Go forth then yourselves, and shew the way to your Jewish brethren: and let them see in you the excellence of that religion which you exhort them to embrace.]

2. Endeavour to promote the experience of them in your Jewish brethren—

[I beg leave to repeat what I have before asserted, that it is by the use of suitable means that God will accomplish their conversion. See what means the Apostles used, in the first ages of the Church. Such are we also to use in the present day. If this be doubted, let any man tell us, Where has God dispensed with them? My text, even if there were no other passage to the same effect, sufficiently shews, that he has not dispensed with means, but requires them to be used by us in an humble dependence upon him. Let the directions of the text then be followed by us. Let us endeavour to shew them, that God has now made a way for their return to him. Let us labour by all possible means to remove from them the stumbling-blocks that lie in their way, and by courtesy and love to smooth their way before them. Let us encourage them to the utmost of our power, by pointing out to them the Messiah, of whom their law and their prophets have so fully testified; and by setting before them the great and precious promises which God has given them of acceptance through him.

^r 1 John v. 19. Ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ.

^s 2 Cor. vi. 17. compared with Isai. lii. 17.

^t Heb. xii. 13.

I say, let us strive in earnest to convey to them the blessings, which, through the labours of their forefathers, we ourselves have received. "Freely we have received; let us freely give;" and, if but a single soul be given us as the fruit of our labours, let us remember, that that one soul is of more value than the whole world.]

MXII.

MESSIAH'S TRIUMPHS.

Isai. lxiii. 1. *Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.*

TO us who are accustomed to view the whole plan of Christianity accomplished, the tidings of our Lord's resurrection are heard without any particular emotion. The subversion of a dynasty that has spread desolation and misery through one quarter of the globe, is occupying every mind and every tongue^a: but the subversion of Satan's empire over the whole world, and the destruction of sin and Satan, death and hell, by the resurrection of Christ, is regarded as an old uninteresting tale. It was not however so uninteresting to the first disciples: when they were mourning under the most grievous disappointment, and were informed that their Lord was risen from the dead, they could not believe it: and when some who had ascertained the fact, went to inform the others, they were considered as visionaries, who were either deceiving or deceived: but when the point was fully established, nothing could exceed the joy that pervaded every breast. Somewhat of that holy feeling was expressed by the prophet, in the words before us. Certain it is, that our Church so understands the passage; because it is appointed to be read, instead of an Epistle, on the Monday preceding Easter. Nor can there be any doubt but that

^a Preached April 10th, 1814, the morning that the news of Buonaparte's abdication of the throne of France was announced at Cambridge.

this is its real import. It is to Jesus that the questions in our text refer; and he it is who gives the answer to them. Let us consider then our text,

I. In a way of solemn inquiry—

There are those who think the person spoken of was Judas Maccabeus; because he gained a great victory over the Edomites, who were afterwards compelled to embrace the Jewish religion. But it is evident, that the words cannot refer to him, because he could not possibly speak of himself in such terms, as are used both in our text and in the following verses^b. It is to the Lord Jesus Christ alone that the words can with any propriety be applied.

The Edomites, as being the most bitter enemies of the Jews^c, were types and figures of the Church's enemies, on whom God has decreed to take signal vengeance^d: and it is probable that the full accomplishment of this prophecy in its literal sense is yet to come. But in its mystical and spiritual sense it has already been fulfilled, by the triumphs of our Lord Jesus Christ over all his spiritual enemies.

He triumphed over them upon his cross—

[It seemed as if his enemies *then* triumphed over him: but he never triumphed more than in the hour when he bowed his head and gave up the ghost. It is true, that Satan then bruised his *heel*; but he bruised Satan's *head*, and inflicted a wound that will issue in his everlasting destruction^e. Previous to this final combat he proclaimed the certain conquest^f; and in it he gained the victory. He entered, as it were, into the very palace of the god of this world, and spoiled his goods^g; yea, "he spoiled all the principalities and powers of hell, triumphing over them openly on the cross^h." It was by making an atonement for sin that he effected reconciliation between God and man — — — and thus "by his death he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil," and delivered from their "sore bondage" the countless millions of his redeemedⁱ.]

He triumphed over them still more in his resurrection and ascension—

^b ver. 4.

^c Amos i. 11, 12.

^d Isai. xxxiv. 5, 6.

^e Gen. iii. 15.

^f John xii. 31. and xvi. 11.

^g Luke xi. 21, 22.

^h Col. ii. 15.

ⁱ Heb. ii. 14, 15.

[If in his death he discharged our debt, in his resurrection he was liberated from the prison of the grave, and declared to have fulfilled every thing that was necessary for man's salvation. Hence he is represented as a mighty Conqueror, surrounded by myriads of the heavenly host, and "leading captivity itself captive," dragging, as it were, at his chariot wheels, the vanquished powers of darkness^k. In his death the victory was gained; but in his resurrection and ascension the triumph was celebrated, and proclaimed. Hence to these the Apostle Peter refers us, as unquestionable evidences of his Messiahship, and as demonstrations that he is the only Saviour of the world^l.]

He has carried on, and will ere long complete, his triumphs in the gathering together of his elect people from every quarter of the globe—

[On the day of Pentecost he rescued three thousand vassals from Satan's tyrannic sway: and from that day has he set at liberty multitudes both of Jews and Gentiles, by the operation of his grace upon their hearts. Yet daily too is he still gaining more and more ground on the dominions of the wicked one; and ere long will his triumphs be complete, when "all the kingdoms of the world" shall acknowledge him as their Sovereign, their Saviour, and their God.]

Let us now view the words of our text,

II. In a way of devout reflection—

The mode of expression used by the prophet, naturally leads us to this, as indeed the most appropriate view. When he asks, "Who is this?" he intends to express his admiration of the object; just as the prophet Micah does of Jehovah, "Who is a God like unto thee^m? Let us then contemplate our adorable Saviour, as exhibited to us in our text: let us contemplate,

1. The representation given of him—

[Commentators who interpret this passage of the Saviour, as having his garments dyed with *his own* blood, quite mistake its meaning: it is with the blood of his enemies that he is covered, just as a warrior may be supposed to be, when returning from the slaughter of his enemies. And this is the view frequently given of him in the Holy Scriptures. His garments previous to the battleⁿ — — —, together with his going forth to the engagement^o — — —, and the slaughter consequent

^k Col. ii. 15.

^l Acts ii. 32—36.

^m Mic. vii. 18.

ⁿ Isai. lix. 16, 17.

^o Ps. xlv. 3—5.

upon it^p — — —, are described in other parts of Holy Writ; and by them is our interpretation of this passage elucidated and confirmed. Let us then behold with admiration this mighty Conqueror, now so “glorious in his apparel, and travelling in the greatness of his strength.” He appears not as one exhausted with fatigue, but as one whom no enemy can resist. Let us ascribe to him the honour due unto his name; and let the song by which the typical victory of Jehovah at the Red Sea was celebrated, be sung by us; for our Jesus “hath triumphed gloriously:” “Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders^q?”]

2. The description given of himself—

[In his reply to the question, “Who is this?” he informs us who he is; “I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.” Not only does he “speak *in* righteousness,” as the true and faithful witness, but he speaks *of* righteousness, and is the great Herald that proclaims it to a ruined world. He himself has by his death “brought in an everlasting righteousness^r,” which shall be “unto all, and upon all, that believe in him^s.” Hear with what extreme earnestness he proclaims it to the whole world^t: and shall we not adore such a Benefactor as He? Shall sinners, who have no righteousness of their own, “be made the righteousness of God in him^u,” and not exult? Shall they not glory in him as “The Lord their righteousness^x,” and boast, each one for himself, “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength^y?”]

But consider further how “mighty he is to save:” he is “a Saviour and a Great One^z,” even “a Prince and a Saviour^a,” or rather as he is called by an inspired Apostle, “The great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ^b.” This is the great argument whereby he encourages us all to trust in him; “Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; *for I am God^c*!” and this is the view in which all his Ministers are commanded to hold him forth: we must “lift up our voice with strength, and say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God^d!”]

Whilst then from “his garments dyed in blood” we discern how able he is to destroy, let us remember, that he is able also to save^e, yea, “able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him^f.”]

^p Rev. xix. 11—18, 21. Mark especially ver. 13, 16.

^q Exod. xv. 1, 3—11.

^r Dan. ix. 24.

^s Rom. iii. 22.

^t Isai. li. 4—6.

^u 2 Cor. v. 21.

^x Jer. xxiii. 6.

^y Isai. xlv. 24, 25.

^z Isai. xix. 20.

^a Acts v. 31.

^b Tit. ii. 13.

^c Isai. xlv. 22.

^d Isai. xl. 9, 10.

^e Jam. iv. 12.

^f Heb. vii. 25.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who believe in him—

[Keep your eyes steadily fixed on this glorious Saviour: and remember, that “*he trod the wine-press alone*”^g; there was none with him in the conflict he sustained; nor must any one presume to claim a share in the honour of his victories: his was the power; his must be the glory. So indeed must be the glory of all that is wrought in us; for it is by his grace alone that we can do even the smallest good. Let him then be gratefully acknowledged as “the Author and the finisher” of your whole salvation.]

2. Those who entertain no admiring thoughts of him—

[O that you would reflect how terrible it will be to be found amongst his enemies! Let it suffice that his garments are dyed with the blood of others; and let them not be dyed with *your* blood. In the very passage before us, he tells us how insupportable his wrath will be^h: O provoke it not! but humble yourselves before him, whilst yet the day of mercy lasts: for “God has set him upon his holy hill of Zion,” and has engaged to make all “his enemies his footstool.” And be assured that if you will not bow before the sceptre of his grace, he will “break you in pieces as a potter’s vesselⁱ.”]

g ver. 3.

h ver. 6.

i Ps. ii. 6, 9.

MXIII.

THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF THE LORD.

Isai. lxiii. 7. *I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving-kindnesses.*

NOTHING conduces more to the production of true repentance than a view of the mercies of our God. A sight of sin only will often lead to despondency; or, if attended with a determination to seek for mercy, will never melt the soul into deep contrition. It is the contrasted view of God’s goodness, and of our own depravity, that alone begets ingenuous shame, and unfeigned self-abhorrence: it is from thence alone that we derive the complete knowledge

of our own vileness, and are enabled to maintain a hope of acceptance with God, notwithstanding all our desert of his wrath and indignation.

In the latter part of this chapter, and the whole of the next, we have a confession, which seems to have been drawn up for the use of the Church, when they should be in captivity in Babylon. But the prayer itself begins with the words of our text; wherein we have an acknowledgment of God's unbounded goodness to his people; an acknowledgment, which is amplified and illustrated in the following verses by a variety of particulars. In this view it was an excellent preparation for that self-abasement which they were to express in the subsequent confession.

We shall find it a profitable subject for our present contemplation to consider the loving-kindness of our God to us: and that we may confine our thoughts within a proper limit, we shall shew,

I. What there is in the loving-kindness of our God that deserves particular notice—

It is obvious, that the subject, taken in all its latitude, is absolutely inexhaustible. But by confining our attention to some prominent parts of it, we shall be enabled to form a just conception of the whole, without being distracted by too great a variety of particulars. Let us then notice,

1. Its freeness and sovereignty—

[The freeness of God's mercies is that which constitutes their first and most distinguishing feature: without adverting to that, we can never have any just conception of them at all. If we suppose God to have any respect to human *merit*, and to confer his favours *on account of that*, we undermine the principal foundations of our gratitude, and take honour to ourselves in exact proportion as we ought to give glory unto him. But a very little reflection will suffice to shew us, that God is altogether sovereign in the distribution of his favours. Who made the difference between the apostate angels and fallen man? or what was there in us, rather than in them, that induced God to provide a Saviour for us, when no such mercy was vouchsafed to them? Who has made the difference between the benighted Heathens and ourselves? or wherein have we merited that God should send us the light of revelation, when

they are left in darkness and the shadow of death, and given up to follow their own delusions? If we prosecute the same inquiry in relation to the distinctions visible amongst ourselves, we shall be constrained to come to the same conclusion; "By the grace of God we are what we are." It is manifest, that still, as in former ages, "things which are hid from the wise and prudent are revealed unto babes;" and the only reason we can give for it, is that which our Lord himself assigned, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight^a." Whether therefore we look at our rank in society, our intellects, our bodily constitution, or our attainments in grace, we must confess, that it is "God, and God alone, that has made any of us to differ^b."]

2. Its richness and variety—

[Were we to attempt to enumerate particulars, we should not know where to begin, or where to end. The mercies we enjoy *as men*, in contradistinction to all the rest of the creation, are unspeakably great — — — Nor should we overlook those which we possess *as Britons*^c — — — but, above all, those which we enjoy *as Christians*, deserve our most attentive consideration. That we have a Saviour to whom we may flee for refuge, and who is able and willing to save us to the uttermost; that we have the aids of the Holy Spirit promised to us for the renovating of our fallen nature; that the invitations and promises of the Gospel are yet sounding in our ears, when so many millions of our fellow-creatures have received their final doom, and are gone beyond a possibility of redemption; these things, I say, display in its brightest colours the loving-kindness of our God to *us*; and therefore we should meditate upon them day and night.

We have a striking pattern for our imitation in Nehemiah: he wished to impress the Jews with a sense of God's goodness to them, and therefore set it forth before them in a variety of most affecting particulars^d: let *us* also, for the same end, recall to mind the mercies which we ourselves have experienced at his hands; and we shall find them countless as the sands upon the sea shore.]

3. Its constancy and continuance—

[After all, we scarcely know whether this be not the view in which the loving-kindness of our God appears to greatest advantage. This seemed to Nehemiah to be the crown and summit of God's mercies vouchsafed to the Jewish nation^e:

^a Matt. xi. 25, 26. See also Ezek. xvi. 3—6. ^b 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^c Here the particular occasion that is celebrated may be introduced.

^d Neh. ix. 7—15.

^e Neh. ix. 16—21, 26—31.

and certainly not even the greatest of his mercies astonishes us more than the continuance of them to us. Let us but reflect, how numerous our provocations have been, and what ungrateful returns we have made to God for all his loving-kindness, and we shall stand amazed at his patience, and long-suffering, and forbearance: we shall be surprised that he has not long since shut up his tender mercies in displeasure, and “sworn, in his wrath, that we should not enter into his rest.” We shall then understand (what else is quite inexplicable) why David, in a psalm of only twenty-six verses, repeats no less than twenty-six times that “God’s mercy endureth for ever^f:” we shall see that to this, and to this alone, we owe it, that **WE** have not been consumed long ago^g.]

Let us proceed to consider,

II. In what manner, and for what ends, we should notice it—

And,

1. As to the manner—

[A mere speculative view of this subject is by no means that which becomes us. We should consider it with *the profoundest admiration, and the liveliest gratitude*.

One might as well expect a person to speak in a light manner of sin, as of the mercies of his God. There is something so vast and incomprehensible in the loving-kindness of God, that the very thought of it should utterly overwhelm us. The exclamation of St. Paul, when contemplating the decrees of Providence respecting the calling of the Gentiles, and the restoration of the Jews, is that which suits us in reference to the subject before us; “O the depth! O the depth! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out^h!” Even a Heathen, when restored to the exercise of his understanding, was so amazed at the goodness of Jehovah, that he exclaimed, “How great are his signs, and how mighty are his wondersⁱ!” How much more then ought *we* to be impressed with it, to whom it is revealed in the stupendous work of redemption! Surely the meditation of the prophet should be ever on our mind, and his words upon our lips; “How great is his goodness, how great is his beauty^k!”

Yet, as the angels, who veil their faces and their feet before the Deity from a sense of their unworthiness to behold or serve him, do yet exert themselves to the utmost to exalt his name; so *we*, however incapable of comprehending fully the mercies of our God, should do our utmost to praise and

^f Ps. cxxxvi.

^g Lam. iii. 22.

^h Rom. xi. 33.

ⁱ Dan. iv. 2, 3.

^k Zech. ix. 17.

glorify him on account of them. David stirred up "his soul, and all that was within him, to bless the Lord, who had crowned him with mercy and loving-kindness¹." And we are taught by the prophet the precise terms, as it were, in which it becomes us to express our gratitude to God^m. The very words of our text may serve to shew us in what manner our *admiration* and *gratitude* should be combined: if I may so speak, our admiration should be lively, and our gratitude profound.]

2. As to the ends—

[No other meditation, no subject of discourse, more imperiously demands your notice than this. You should reflect upon, and "mention" the loving-kindness of God, both *for the instruction of others*, and *the encouragement of your own souls*.

How are others to become acquainted with God, if you, whose understandings are enlightened, do not endeavour to instruct them? or to what purpose has God imparted to you the knowledge of himself, if you do not impart it to those around you? "Your light is not to be hid under a bushel, but to be put on a candlestick," that it may be a source of benefit to others. It is the command of God that his mercies should be thus treasured up in the minds of all, and be transmitted by oral testimony from generation to generationⁿ. And the more truly any persons have been devoted to God themselves, the more active and exemplary they have been in making him known to others^o.

And what can be such a source of encouragement to yourselves? There is nothing like this to encourage you *to pray*: "the goodness of God is revealed on purpose to lead you to repentance^p," and to animate your petitions at the throne of grace^q. And what can so embolden you *to trust in God*? Were you to contemplate nothing but his power, you might be filled with dread, rather than with confidence: but when you consider his goodness also, your hopes of mercy are strengthened, and you are led to commit yourselves to his fatherly protection^r. Surely also there cannot be found any stronger inducement *to serve him*. "What shall I render unto the Lord?" is the natural question that must arise in the bosom of every one that feels his obligations to the Lord^s: and if we did not "serve the Lord with gladness and joyfulness of heart for the abundance of the mercies" he has vouchsafed unto us, we should be filled with self-reproach, and be constrained to acknowledge ourselves deserving of the heaviest condemnation^t.]

¹ Ps. ciii. 1—4.

^m Isai. xii. 4—6.

ⁿ Ps. lxxviii. 2—7.

^o Ps. cxlv. 1—8.

^p Rom. ii. 4.

^q Ps. li. 1. and lxix. 16, 17.

^r Ps. xxxvi. 7.

^s Ps. lxiii. 3.

^t Deut. xxviii. 45, 47.

BEHOLD now, what matter here is,

1. For reproof—

[Is it not surprising, that, surrounded as we are with the mercies and loving-kindness of our God, we should be so insensible of all his goodness? — — — Let us blush for our ingratitude: let us strive henceforth so to “think of his loving-kindness,” that we may say with David, “Thy loving-kindness, O God, is ever before mine eyes^u,” yea, “let us praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works unto the children of men^x.” If we will but contemplate his *acts*, we shall soon become acquainted with his *love*^y.]

2. For encouragement—

[What do we mean by entertaining hard thoughts of God, or doubting his willingness to accept and bless us? His very nature is love^z; and all his acts, though often misapprehended by us, are love also. Be it so, our sins have so abounded, that we seem almost beyond the reach of mercy: “but where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound^a.” And if we will only go and “remind him of his loving-kindnesses which have been ever of old,” we shall find that our plea is absolutely irresistible^b.]

^u Ps. xxvi. 3. and xlviii. 9.

^x Ps. cvii. 8, 15, 21, 31.

^y Ps. cvii. 43.

^z 1 John iv. 8.

^a Rom. v. 20.

^b Ps. xxv. 6, 7, 11.

MXIV.

VEXING THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Isai. lxiii. 8, 10. *He said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour But they rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.*

WE all notice with wonder the perverseness of the Jewish people, and justify in our minds the judgments inflicted on them. But it would be well, if, when looking at them, we beheld our own selves, as in a glass: for verily the whole of their conduct is but a just representation of our own. The expectations which God formed respecting them were such as were perfectly just and reasonable: and when he was so grievously disappointed, we wonder not that he resented it in the way he did.

We shall find it not unprofitable to consider this passage,

I. As fulfilled in the Jewish people—

God's expectations from them were reasonable—

[The mercies which he vouchsafed to them, when "he took them for his own peculiar people," are well known. They are again and again specified in the Holy Scriptures^a — — — In particular, he revealed to them his laws from heaven^b, yea, and "gave his Holy Spirit also to instruct them^c." In doing these things, he said, "Surely they are my people, that will not lie." They will be to me a peculiar people: they will love, and serve, and honour me: and nothing will ever induce them to depart from me.

This, I say, was nothing more than what his mercies towards them most plainly called for. Never had any nation under heaven been dealt with as they had been^d: and therefore he might reasonably expect that they would requite him according to the mercies vouchsafed unto them.]

But they most grievously disappointed him—

["They soon forgot his works, and were disobedient to him at the sea, even at the Red Sea." Their whole conduct was one continued series of murmurings and rebellions; as Moses himself testified, "Ye have been rebellious from the day that I knew you^e."

Nor was it in the wilderness only that they thus grieved and vexed him. When they were brought into Canaan, they still continued a stiff-necked and rebellious people; insomuch that God himself was "broken with their whorish heart^f;" and "was pressed under them, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves^g." Thus they proceeded, till at last they filled up the measure of their iniquities, in the murder of their Messiah.]

His resentment against them, therefore, was most just—

[In the wilderness they so provoked him to anger, that of the whole number who were above twenty years of age at the time of their coming out of Egypt, two only were suffered to enter into the Promised Land. In Canaan, too, he was constrained in like manner to punish their descendants also with the severest judgments, insomuch that on some occasions "his own soul was grieved for the misery of Israel." But all his chastisements proved ineffectual for their permanent

^a See Neh. ix. 7—25.

^b Neh. ix. 13.

^c Neh. ix. 20.

^d Deut. iv. 7, 8, 32—35.

^e Deut. ix. 7. 22—24.

^f Ezek. vi. 9.

^g Amos ii. 13.

reformation; so that he delivered them up, first into the hands of the Chaldeans, and in process of time into the hands of the Romans; and has now, for these eighteen hundred years, made them a spectacle to the whole world, an awful monument of his righteous indignation.]

But wherefore are these things related concerning them? Surely for our sakes. It will therefore be proper for us to consider them,

II. As recorded for our instruction —

The whole history is declared by St. Paul to have been written as an admonition to us^h — — — Let me then ask,

Has not God been disappointed in us?

[The mercies vouchsafed to the Jews were nothing more than shadows of the blessings which we enjoy. What was their redemption, in comparison of ours? — — — What their support in the wilderness, and their possession of the land of Canaan, in comparison of the spiritual food administered to us, and the glory kept in reserve for us? — — — Were the Jews a favoured nation in comparison of the Gentiles? What then are *we* in comparison of the Heathen world? yes, and in comparison of a great part of the Christian world too? How fully and faithfully is the Gospel ministered to you! I may truly say, as Paul did to the Galatians, that “Jesus Christ is evidently set forth crucified before your eyes.”

What, then, must have been God's expectations respecting *you*? Surely of *you* he has said, ‘They will walk before me as dear children: they will never lie: I can depend on them: whoever may neglect me, *they* will not: whoever may disobey me, they will not: I have given myself to them, to be their Saviour; and they will feel their obligations, and surrender up their whole souls to me, to be saved in the way of mine appointments.’

But how have you fulfilled these expectations? Has he seen you devoting yourselves to him in sincerity and truth? Has he not seen you, on the contrary, weary of his service, and going for happiness to an ensnaring world? Has he not seen you indulging many hidden abominations, and yielding to unhallowed tempers; and either neglecting altogether, or performing in a mere heartless and formal way, your duties of prayer and praise? — — —]

May we not then well expect that his anger should be kindled against us?

^h 1 Cor. x. 1—11.

[Yes, truly: such conduct cannot but “grieve” and “vex his Holy Spirit:” and he might well swear concerning the greater part of us, as he did respecting the Jews, that “we shall never enter into his rest.” And what if he should do so? What if, instead of being to us a “Saviour,” he should become our “enemy;” and all “his love and pity should be turned to wrath and fiery indignation? Can we bear the thought? Reflect, I pray you, my Brethren, what “an evil and bitter thing it will be to fall into the hands of the Living God.” Yet can we expect no other, than that he should be thus incensed, when we are multiplying our rebellions against him, and “trampling under foot his dear Son, and doing despite to his Spirit of grace.” He has told us, that “we shall reap according as we sow: if we will sow to the flesh, we must of the flesh reap corruption: but if we will sow to the Spirit, we shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”]

MXV.

THE LOVE OF GOD TOWARDS HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. lxiii. 9. *In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.*

AMONGST those who have the Gospel fully opened to them, the history of the Jews must of necessity be familiar. Yet, however familiar it be to our minds, we need to have it frequently brought to our remembrance, since it exhibits with unrivalled clearness the dispensations of God’s providence, and shadows forth with most astonishing exactness the wonders of his grace. The words which we have just read may be considered as a kind of summary of that history: in them are recorded God’s tender compassion towards his people, whilst they were groaning under the yoke of Pharaoh—the means he used for their deliverance, by sending an angel, the Angel of the Covenant, his only dear Son, to bring them forth from Egypt—the success of those means in their complete redemption—and his continued care over them during the whole period of their sojourning in the wilderness. We might, not unprofitably, enter into a particular consideration of all these events, and

take occasion from them to adore the power and faithfulness of Jehovah: but we propose rather to turn your attention to the mercies vouchsafed unto ourselves; and we would lead you to notice,

I. His tender compassion towards ourselves—

[Even in our unconverted state he looks on us with an eye of pity^a, longing for our return^b, and following us with invitations to accept of mercy^c. But the very instant we begin to feel the burthen of our sins, and to mourn over them, all the tenderest emotions of love are excited in his breast, and he flies, as it were, to raise us from our depression, and to comfort us in our sorrows^d. Every sigh and groan enters into his ears, and every tear is treasured up in his vials^e.

We pass over his sympathy with us under all our subsequent trials, because that will be more advantageously noticed in another part of our discourse; and we proceed to notice,]

II. The wonderful deliverance he vouchsafes unto us—

[The angel by whom God saved the Church in the wilderness, is the same as he still employs for our salvation^f; even “the Messenger of the Covenant^g,” the Lord Jesus Christ^h. He has sent that divine person to “redeem us,” not by power only, but by price, even the inestimable price of his own bloodⁱ. And to what must we ascribe this stupendous gift? Was it bestowed on account of any merit in us, either that God had already seen, or that he foresaw as hereafter to exist? No: it was to “his love and pity” alone that we are indebted, either for his first gift of his Son to redeem the world, or for his application of that redemption to our souls. “He loved us, because he would love us^k :” and to his free and sovereign grace must all the glory be ascribed, by all the hosts of his redeemed for ever and ever.

But our obligation to his love and pity are best seen in,]

III. The continued care with which he watches over us—

[Exceeding beautiful is the description given of his attention to his people in the wilderness^l: and justly may it be considered as illustrating the care which he takes of us^m.

^a Compare Exod. iii. 7. with Hos. xi. 7—9. ^b Jer. xiii. 27.

^c Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

^d Luke xv. 20.

^e See that beautiful representation of his love, Jer. xxxi. 18, 20.

^f Compare Exod. iii. 1—6, 13, 14. with Acts vii. 30—34.

^g Mal. iii. 1. ^h 1 Cor. x. 9. ⁱ 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. Rev. v. 9.

^k Deut. vii. 7, 8.

^l Deut. xxxii. 10—12.

^m See Isai. xl. 11. and xlv. 3, 4.

There is not any state in which his eye is not upon us for good. Are we assaulted by persecution or temptation? he stands ready to succour us with grace sufficient for us, and to make us "more than conquerors" over all. Every returning want will he supplyⁿ, and "keep us by his power through faith unto everlasting salvation^o."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are the Lord's only in name and profession—

[Such, alas! were the great mass of those who came out of Egypt; and therefore they were left to perish in the wilderness. This is particularly specified in the words following our text^p: and the same fate will befall us also, if we do not give up ourselves to God in a way of holy obedience^q.]

2. Those who are his in deed and in truth—

[Two things we wish you ever to bear in mind; namely, your privileges, and your obligations. As for your privileges, what tongue can ever declare them, what finite understanding can ever fully apprehend them? O remember "the Rock whence ye are hewn, and the hole of the pit whence ye are digged," and let the wonders of redemption be your meditation day and night. Consider too your obligations. "What manner of people ought ye to be, in all holy conversation and godliness!" Surely, "having been bought with so great a price, ye should ever glorify your God with your body and your spirit, which are his^r."]

ⁿ Isai. xxxiii. 16. and xli. 17, 18.

^o 1 Pet. i. 5.

^p ver. 10.

^q Exod. xxiii. 20, 21. with Matt. vii. 21.

^r 1 Cor. vi. 20.

MXVI.

GOD CONTEMPLATED.

Isai. lxiii. 11—14. *Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is He that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where is He that put his Holy Spirit within him? that led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? that led them through the deep as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.*

THESE are supposed, by some, to be the words of Jehovah: but they seem rather to be spoken by Israel, who, under the chastisements of the Most High, were brought to a measure of penitential reflection. Such was the effect which God designed to produce upon them^a. And he complained when his judgments did not operate thus favourably upon their minds^b — — — A review of former mercies is at all times very desirable, as well for our own comfort as for God's glory. I would therefore now call upon you to contemplate the Most High,

I. In a way of grateful recollection—

The wonders wrought for Israel, in their redemption from Egypt, are here recounted—

[Here they record their passage through the Red Sea, and the special influences of the Spirit of God upon Moses and the elders, during their sojourning in the Wilderness, and their final rest in Canaan, the promised land. *Repeatedly* is every one of these mercies specified in my text. *Thrice* is a passage through the sea mentioned; with this particular circumstance, that, whereas the bottom of the sea is for the most part abrupt and rugged, it was so smoothed for them, that the whole nation, men, women, children, and all their cattle, were enabled to pass it “without stumbling,” and with the same facility as a horse moves in the open field. Twice also is the Holy Spirit mentioned, as exerting his all-powerful influence on the minds of their leaders, so as to conduct them in the safest way, and to the greatest possible advantage. Their final rest too in Canaan is illustrated by a beautiful simile of a beast, which, after all his labours, descends into a fertile valley, and, under the eye of his master, enjoys in the greatest perfection such provision and rest as his necessities require.

These things formed the principal theme of praise and thanksgiving to that people in all ages. After their return from Babylon, Nehemiah expatiated upon them with adoring gratitude^c: and to this hour they are deservedly the great subject of that nation's boast.]

Nor are they less interesting to us than to the Jews themselves—

[In these manifestations of God's power and grace, we

^a Jer. iii. 4.

^b Cite Jer. ii. 5—7. which precisely accords with the text.

^c Neh. ix. 5—25.

see far more than in any description of the Deity that could be given us. Here we see Jehovah *in action*, if I may so speak. Every one of his perfections is here painted, as it were, to the very life. Whatever expressions might be used to characterize his condescension and love, we could not form so just a conception of him as from this history. Behold his sovereignty, in choosing a people so unworthy of his love! Behold his power, in bringing them forth from the midst of such a powerful nation, that were determined to retain them in their bondage! Behold his care over them for the space of forty years, providing for their every want; and his truth and faithfulness, in bringing them at last into the promised land! And is he not the same God now? Or will he do less for his people now? or rather, will he not do at this time for the souls of his people as much as he then did for their bodies? I say, these manifestations of his power and grace deserve to be reviewed by us, no less than by the Jews themselves: and we suffer great loss, in not calling them more frequently and more gratefully to our remembrance.]

But let us contemplate him more especially,

II. In a way of affectionate inquiry—

Twice is the inquiry made, “Where is he?” And this inquiry should be made by us,

1. That we may obtain similar mercies at his hands—

[We need, in fact, the very same mercies as were vouchsafed to the Jews of old. For, are not we also in bondage? — — — And can any thing less than Omnipotence deliver us? Are there not also seas of difficulty before us, through which we need to be brought by the spiritual influence of Heaven? — — — And do we not need the Holy Spirit also, to instruct and guide us in all our way, and to accomplish in us and for us all the good pleasure of our God? — — — Need we not the same provision also for our daily wants? And do we not need that rest which remaineth for us in the Canaan above? — — — Yes, in truth: all that was vouchsafed to Israel of old, is a *type*, and not a type only, but a *pledge* also, of what shall be vouchsafed to *us*, if only we commit ourselves, like Israel of old, to the guidance and protection of our God^d. Inquire, then, I pray you, “Where is this God?” “Where is He” that did these wonders for his people of old; that we may supplicate his favour, and have them renewed to *us*?]

2. That we may render to him the honour due unto his name—

^d Illustrate this by Ps. lxxvii. 5, 11, 12, 15, 19, 20.

[This also is *twice* mentioned, as God's peculiar design in all that he wrought for Israel of old. And surely it should be a primary motive with us in contemplating all which he did for *them*, and all that he has done for *us* also, in that more wonderful redemption which he has accomplished for us through the Son of his love. Methinks our hearts should be full of it: we should never forget it for a single moment: we should be speaking of it every day, and all the day long. We should never be contented to remain at a distance from him. In attending upon the public ordinances, we should go in this spirit; "Where is he?" "I want to find my God; I want to tell him of all his tender mercies; and to adore him for all the wonders of his love." In our secret chamber, too, this should be our one desire; nor should we be ever satisfied, till we can say, with the Church of old, "I have found Him whom my soul loveth^e." The constant habit of our mind, whether in public or private, should be, "I will mention the loving-kindness of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed upon us; and the great goodness toward the house of Israel that he hath bestowed on them, according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving-kindnesses^f."]]

SEE, then, Brethren,

1. What improvement to make of your troubles—

[They are sent in order to bring you nigh unto God^g: and if they produce this effect, you will have reason to bless God for them to all eternity. Be careful, however, that these impressions do not pass away with the occasion that calls them forth. Alas! our better feelings too often prove but transient^h — — — And then, like metal taken from the furnace, we become only the more obdurate. But "we hope better things of you;" and that you will be able to attest, that your trials have only quickened your desires after God, and rendered you more thankful for all the mercies that have been vouchsafed unto you.]

2. What to expect at the hands of God—

[See, in the text, Elijah's mantle; and take it up; and, with an impassable river before you, strike the waters in faith, saying, "Where is the Lord God of Elijahⁱ?" See how the Church of old acted in the extremity of her trouble: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord! awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old! Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab (Egypt), and wounded the dragon? Art thou

^e Cant. iii. 3, 4.

^f ver. 7.

^g Hos. v. 15. and vii. 14, 16.

^h See Ps. lxxviii. 34—37.

ⁱ 2 Kings ii. 14.

not it which *hath dried the sea*, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over^k?" Thus may you expect *your greatest obstacles to be made the very means of your preservation*. Only picture to yourselves the weary beast feeding or reclining in the fertile valley; and there you have the perfect image of what shall be done for you, when once your appointed labours shall be ended: you shall then "rest for ever from your labours," and enjoy perfect peace in the bosom of your God.]

^k Isai. li. 9, 10.

MXVII.

PLEADING WITH GOD.

Isai. lxiii. 15, 16. *Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies towards me? Are they restrained? Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; thy name is from everlasting.*

BEHOLD a suppliant in the presence of his God. Draw near, my Brethren; and hear his pleadings at the throne of grace. Surely from this you may learn much of the condescension of your God, who suffers himself to be so addressed; and much of your own exalted privileges, in that, in every time of need, you have such a God, before whom you can spread your wants, and from whom you can obtain whatsoever your necessities may require.

The words before us may be supposed to be uttered by a pious Jew, mourning over the desolation of his country during the Babylonish captivity, and pleading with God for a restoration of the blessings which it was once the high privilege of his nation to enjoy.

The whole of the Jews' captivity in Babylon, and of their redemption from it, was of a typical nature; and may well be considered as prefiguring the trials and deliverances of God's people in all ages. St. Paul quotes a part of this prayer, in this very view; and shews, that the things here implored were not confined to that particular occasion, but have their

accomplishment under the Christian dispensation^a. I may well, therefore, lead you to consider,

I. To what circumstances God's people may be reduced—

The whole Bible attests, that God's people are more or less “a poor and afflicted people^b.”

They are exposed, like others, to *temporal* afflictions—

[They have no exemption from troubles, either personal or domestic. Disease, with all its attendant evils, will press on them as well as others; and the loss of dear relatives be felt by them as keenly as by any others. And especially if there be misconduct in their offspring, it will be more acute and pungent in them, in proportion as they feel the value of their own souls, and are concerned for the souls of those connected with them. In addition to the common calamities of life, they have also some as arising from religion itself. For who ever followed the Lord fully without having a cross to bear? We are told, that “all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” And so we find it in actual experience. From the time of Abel to the present hour, there has not been one who was “really born after the Spirit that has not been hated and persecuted by those who have been born only after the flesh^c.”]

To *spiritual* troubles, also, they are subjected in no slight degree—

[*At their first turning to the Lord*, they are not unfrequently bowed down under such a load of guilt as makes them apprehensive that they shall never find acceptance with their offended God. And, *at subsequent periods also*, they are often “in heaviness, through manifold temptations.” Satan, their malignant adversary, harasses them with his assaults; and with his fiery darts inflicts a wound upon their inmost souls^d. Sometimes, too, they are made to experience the hidings of God's face, and to fear that he has utterly withdrawn his loving-kindness from them^e. In comparison of this, all other troubles are light: “The spirit of a man may sustain any common infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?” Even our blessed Lord, who uttered no complaint on account of any other sufferings, cried out by reason of this, “My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?”]

^a Compare chap. lxiv. 4. with 1 Cor. ii. 9. ^b Zeph. iii. 12.

^c Gal. iv. 29. ^d Eph. vi. 16. ^e Ps. lxxvii. 2, 3, 7, 8, 9.

But in my text we see,

II. To whom we should betake ourselves, under such circumstances—

St. James says, “Is any afflicted? let him pray.” Prayer is the great antidote to affliction of every kind. And here we see in what way we should approach our God. We should draw nigh to him,

1. In a way of humble expostulation—

[Expostulation, if devoid of humility, would be most offensive to God: for “God giveth not account of any of his matters:” and to call him to our bar, would be presumption in the extreme. Yet God is pleased to allow us to approach him, and even to expostulate with him, provided we come to him with real humility and contrition. Though he dwells in the high and holy place, yet will he regard the cry of the poor destitute; and “from the habitation of his holiness and his glory” supply his every want. He has a zeal for his people’s good: he has said, that “he will plant them in the heavenly land assuredly, with his whole heart and with his whole soul^f.” He feels for them, too, as a tender parent for his child under some great calamity. His whole soul is in a state of commotion on their account^g. But, if we be under circumstances of distress, without any immediate relief from him, he will *appear* to have “forsaken and forgotten us.” On those occasions, therefore, he permits us to address him in the language of expostulation: “Look down from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory. Where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies towards me? Are they restrained?” Yes: not only will he approve of such holy importunity, but he will never suffer such prayers to ascend in vain^h.]

2. In a way of confident affiance—

[There are times and seasons when a person, who is on the whole pious, may, by reason of his trials, seem to be abandoned of his God, and scarcely be recognised as having the divine image enstamped upon him. Thus it was with Job, under his heavy and accumulated calamities. But a person should not, therefore, cast away his confidence; but rather hold it the faster, that it may afford him consolation and support under the pressure of his troubles. He may, in addition to his expostulations with God, lay hold upon him under the endearing relation of a Father: “Doubtless, thou art our

^f Jer. xxxii. 40, 41.

^g Hos. xi. 8. Jer. xxxi. 20.

^h Ps. xlii. 9—11.

Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou art our Father, our Redeemer; thy name is from everlasting." A person may have an evidence in his own soul that he has been adopted by God, yea, and been born of him: he may be sure, in his own mind, that he has been redeemed from death and hell, and been brought into the light and liberty of God's children: and he may look to God as one whose "name is from everlasting," and who will approve himself to be "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." O! what consolation will flow into the soul from this recognition of God's relation to us in our low estate! I say, Brethren, "hold fast this rejoicing of your hope firm unto the end;" and you will find, that with this anchor fixed within the veil, you will outride the storm, and be brought in safety to the desired haven.]

Let me, in conclusion, ASK,

1. What know you experimentally of this method of pleading with God?

[The pulse does not so clearly mark the state of our bodies, as our prayers mark the state of our souls. Many, in their whole lives, have never thus expostulated with God; or held fast their relation to him, as their plea for mercy. In fact, the generality of Christians would account this to be the most insufferable presumption. But I call on you, under all trials to which you can ever be reduced, to "encourage yourselves in the Lord your God;" and, like Israel of old, to wrestle with him in prayer, till you have obtained the desired blessing.]

2. What warrant have you for the confidence which such expostulations imply?

[Before you can say with truth, "Doubtless, thou art our Father, and our Redeemer," you must have experienced the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit; and must have fled to Christ for refuge, as your only hope. Others, indeed, may not have noticed in you this change, so as fully to recognise you under your new character: but you must be deeply conscious of the secret exercises of your soul before God; and must be able to appeal to the heart-searching God, that you have thus sought mercy at his hands. Tell me then, Brethren, whether you can thus appeal to God? And, if your conscience testify against you, that you are yet unregenerate, and without an interest in Christ, let your trials be regarded by you as messengers from the Most High, to call you into a state of reconciliation with him, and to save you from the troubles that shall never end.]

MXVIII.

IMPERFECTION OF OUR BEST SERVICES.

Isai. lxiv. 6. *We are all as an unclean thing; and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.*

HUMILITY is that grace which is most suited to our condition as fallen creatures; and, that we may be assisted in the pursuit of it, God has graciously given us, not only promises for our encouragement, but patterns for our imitation, and models for our use. We cannot have any more instructive pattern than that which is exhibited in the repenting publican, or in the returning prodigal. Of models, that which David has left us, in the fifty-first Psalm, is perhaps the most distinguished, and of most general utility: but that which is contained in this, and part of the preceding, chapter, excepting only some few expressions, is almost equally applicable to the Christian world. The whole of it is a prayer drawn up by the prophet for the use of the Jews, when they should be in captivity in Babylon. We shall not enter into it at large, but shall confine our attention to the passage which we have just read, which most justly describes our state before God,

I. In general terms—

There were many things considered as unclean under the Jewish dispensation: and whosoever touched them was deemed unclean; and, till he had been purified according to the law, he was kept both from the house of God and from all his fellow-creatures, lest he should communicate to others the defilement which he had contracted. Hence, when the prophet says, “We are all as an unclean thing,” he must be understood to say, that we are,

1. Unclean in ourselves—

[Who can look inward for one moment, and not confess this melancholy truth?— — —]

2. Defiling to others—

[The whole of our intercourse with each other tends to

foster some vile affection, some “earthly, sensual, or devilish” inclination — — —]

3. In a state of separation from God and his people—

[We have by nature no delight in God: we are averse to his service, his worship, his people: our “carnal minds are enmity against him,” and against every thing that leads to him, or sets him before our eyes — — — We “say continually in our hearts, Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.”]

Wretched as our state appears from this representation, the prophet sets it forth in a far more humiliating view,

II. By a particular comparison—

In the former clause of the text the prophet speaks of us as we are *on the whole*: but in the latter part he speaks of our “*righteousnesses*” *only*: and these he compares to a leprous garment, which by God’s express command was to be consigned to the flames. The truth of this comparison appears, in that all our best deeds are,

1. Defective—

[If we measure them by a standard of our own, we may discern no flaw in them: but the perfect law of God is that by which they must be tried: and where has there been one action of our lives that has fully come up to that standard? — — — We are required to love God with all our heart, and all our mind, and all our soul, and all our strength; and our neighbour as ourselves: but what duty that we ever performed to God or man will stand this test? — — — Hence we must confess, that every thing we have done has been impure in the sight of God — — —]

2. Mixed with sin—

[Pride and self-righteousness cleave to us as long as we are in an unconverted state; and the more exemplary our conduct is, the more it calls forth, and seems to justify, those hateful propensities. Let the most moral person look into his own heart, and see whether, instead of being filled with self-loathing and self-abhorrence on account of his defects, he do not find a self-preference and self-complacency arising in his heart, and prompting him to say, like the elated Pharisee, “I thank thee, O God, that I am not as other men.” Now this is a fly, that would render the most precious ointment offensive^a. While

^a Eccl. x. 1.

such a disposition as this is harboured in our hearts, we, and all that we do, must be hateful in the sight of God, and render us fit only to be cast, as most abhorred objects, into the fire of hell^b.]

This subject may be IMPROVED for,

1. Our conviction—

[We are very backward to acknowledge ourselves so depraved as we really are. But this declaration of God is sufficient to humble the proudest heart. It is not atrocious sinners only that are thus vile, but “*all*,” all without exception. Nor are our worst actions only thus defiled, but *all*, even our best; “*all* our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.” Let all then, without exception, humble themselves as “unclean^c,” and “vile^d,” and altogether destitute of any thing that is good^e.]

2. Our direction—

[Our own righteousness must be wholly renounced; and all of us must enter into the kingdom of heaven on the very same footing as publicans and harlots. This is humiliating to our proud nature; but it must be done: for, if it would be unseemly to introduce to an earthly monarch his bride clothed in “filthy rags,” much more would it be so to present our souls to the heavenly Bridegroom clad in such polluted garments as ours. St. Paul himself felt the necessity of a better righteousness than his own^f; and, if ever we would find acceptance with God, we must seek it altogether through the righteousness of Christ.]

3. Our comfort—

[We need not be dejected on account of the foregoing representation; since there is a righteousness offered to us in the Gospel, even “the righteousness of Christ, which is unto all, and upon all them that believe^g.” This is commensurate with our wants: it is absolutely perfect; and it was wrought out by Him^h, in order that we might be clad in it, and “that the shame of our nakedness might not appearⁱ.” Rejoice

^b See Lev. xiii. 47—58. but especially ver. 55, where it was appointed, that though the plague had not spread, or changed its colour, yet if it had eaten off the knap from the cloth, the cloth was to be burned, because it was “*fret inward*.” So, though the whole conversation of a man be not polluted, or even *visibly* bad in any part, yet if there be an inward disposition that is depraved, our great High Priest, when he shall inspect our hearts, will certainly pronounce us leprous, and execute the law upon us.

^c Isai. vi. 5.

^d Job xl. 4.

^e Rom. vii. 18.

^f Phil. iii. 9.

^g Rom. iii. 22.

^h Dan. ix. 24.

ⁱ Rev. iii. 18.

therefore all ye who are conscious of your own depravity, and pray to God that “Christ may be made righteousness unto you^k ;” and that you, both in time and in eternity, may glory in him as “THE LORD YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS¹.”]

^k 1 Cor. i. 30.

¹ Jer. xxiii. 6.

MXIX.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF NEGLECTING PRAYER.

Isai. lxiv. 7. *There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee : for^a thou hast hid thy face from us.*

MAN is encompassed with dangers from which no human foresight can deliver him. He is oppressed with wants which no creature can supply. It is to God that he must look for the blessings which he needs. But he is naturally so averse to prayer, that he will bear all his own burthens rather than apply to God for relief. On this account it is that so many faint under their afflictions; and this was the ground of God’s controversy with his people.

I. The nature of prayer—

Prayer is represented in the Scriptures by a variety of expressions. It is here set forth under the idea of “calling upon God.”

[Petitions, either with or without a form, are not worthy the name of prayer, if they be unattended with a devout spirit. Prayer is a work of the heart rather than of the lips : it supposes that we feel our wants, desire to have them supplied, and believe that God is able and willing to relieve them.]

It is also described as a “taking hold of God.”—

[God has set himself, as it were, before us in the promises. There we may lay hold on him by faith : we may address him as the patriarch of old^b. And this is the means prescribed by God for the attainment of his blessings^c.]

It is further called a “stirring up of oneself” to lay hold on God —

[It is no easy thing to gain access to God in prayer. We engage in it for the most part with much reluctance. Our

^a It should be translated “therefore.” Bishop Lowth.

^b Gen. xxxii. 26.

^c Isai. xxvii. 5.

thoughts wander, ere we are aware, and in spite of our endeavours to fix them. We seem to lose the accustomed energy of our minds. We need again and again to stir up our sluggish hearts.]

When we consider the duty in this light, we shall see reason to lament,

II. The general neglect of it—

Many live entirely without prayer—

[They are wholly occupied with worldly concerns. They are not sensible of any *spiritual* wants. They rely on their own industry for *temporal* advancement. They acknowledge not before God either their sins or their necessities.]

Others only occasionally lift up their hearts to heaven—

[They will cry under the pressure of some heavy affliction^d. But they resemble those spoken of by the prophet^e: like metal from the fire they soon return to their former hardness^f; after some signal deliverance too they will praise God; but, like the Israelites, they will soon forget his mercies^g.]

Some will maintain with constancy an external regard to this duty—

[They will repeat their accustomed form at stated seasons, or they will offer a few general and cold petitions; and with this outward act they will rest satisfied. They feel no pleasure in the duty, but perform it as a task.]

But there are some few indeed who pray to God aright—

[There is a remnant now, as there was in the prophet's days^h. There are some who "stir up their souls to lay hold on God." But these are few when compared with the bulk of mankind: they may be said comparatively to be "none" at all.]

To counteract this evil, we proceed to set forth—

III. The consequences of this neglect—

The tokens of God's displeasure, which those in the text experienced, will be experienced by all who neglect prayer. God will surely "hide his face from them."

He will not reveal to them his glory—

^d Isai. xxvi. 16. ^e Hos. vii. 14. ^f Ps. lxxviii. 34—37.

^g Ps. cvi. 11—13.

^h Isai. viii. 18. The prophet certainly did not mean to include them in his censure.

[He reveals himself to his people as he does not unto the worldⁱ; he shines into their hearts to discover to them his glory. But he will vouchsafe no such mercy to those who call not upon him. His perfections are to them rather an object of terror than of admiration.]

He will not manifest to them his love—

[He often “sheds abroad his love in the hearts” of those who seek him, but the neglecters of prayer “intermeddle not with their joy^k: they are strangers to the spirit of adoption; they rather banish God from their thoughts, and wish like the fool^l, that there were “no God.”]

He will not communicate to them his blessings—

[His faithful worshippers have all the blessings of grace and glory. But others have no part or lot with them. The blessings they do enjoy are turned into a curse unto them; and to eternity they must ascribe their misery to their own neglect^m.]

APPLICATION—

They, who live without prayer, should consider these things—

[This offence has been awfully marked by the indignation of Godⁿ. How bitter must be the reflections of those who perish through this neglect! Surely all should seek the Lord while he *may* be found.]

They also, who are formal in prayer, should lay them to heart—

[These, as being more liable to deceive themselves, are in greater danger. Our prayers must be fervent in order to be effectual^o. If we would enter into heaven, we must press into it with violence^p.]

Nor should this subject ever be forgotten by those who profess godliness—

ⁱ John xiv. 22.

^k Prov. xiv. 10.

^l Ps. xiv. 1. The words in Italics are not in the original.

^m If all the souls that are banished from the Divine presence were asked, “Wherefore has God hid his face from you?” they must assign the reason that is given in the text.

ⁿ Ps. lxxxi. 10—12. “God gave them up:” to what? to their enemies? to death? or to immediate and eternal condemnation? No; to what was worse than even that, “their own hearts’ lust,” that they might “treasure up wrath against the day of wrath.”

^o Jam. v. 16.

^p Matt. xi. 12.

[Unless we stir up ourselves continually, we shall soon lose the Divine presence. We cannot guard too much against formality in prayer. Let us be encouraged by God's gracious declaration^q—]

^q Prov. xv. 8. God is not more pleased with the songs of angels than with the sighs and groans of a contrite soul.

MXX.

DANGER OF DISREGARDING GOD.

Isai. lxxv. 12—14. *Because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not: therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit.*

IN every age, and every place, God is the same: he is the Governor of the universe, and expects obedience from all his creatures, and will deal with them in a way of approbation or displeasure, according as they conduct themselves towards him. Whatever his people do, either in a way of obedience or of disobedience, he will notice it, in order to a suitable retribution; taking into the account every thing which, on the one hand, may either extenuate or aggravate the guilt of the disobedient, or, on the other hand, enhance or detract from the services of the obedient. This is evident in the passage before us, where he specifies his own unwearied kindness to his people as greatly aggravating the guilt of their neglect, and as forming a ground for his executing the heavier judgments upon them.

Let us consider,

I. The evil laid to their charge—

This was indeed heinous beyond measure: for, notwithstanding all the remonstrances of successive prophets whom God sent to warn them of their guilt,

“they forsook the Lord, and forgot his holy mountain,” where they ought to have worshipped him: and “offered sacrifices to a whole troop” of worthless idols. In this respect *we*, through mercy, stand on higher ground than they. Yet, though free from gross idolatry, *we have acted altogether on the same rebellious principle as they*, in that,

1. We have followed, every one of us, our own evil ways—

[We have not all acted in precisely the same way: some have run into the grosser sins of drunkenness and uncleanness, whilst others have been more decorous in their habits of life: but we have all neglected to choose the things wherein God did delight, and have “chosen the things wherein he delighted not.” To fear him, to love him, to serve him, to glorify him, *these* are the things which God would have approved: but how far have they been from being the objects of our choice!— — — A life of carelessness and indifference, of worldliness and vanity, and of an idolatrous attachment to the things of time and sense, *this* is hateful in the sight of God: and this has been our habit from our youth up even until now — — —]

This we have done notwithstanding God’s incessant endeavours to reclaim us—

[How constantly has he spoken to us in his blessed word! With what warnings, and invitations, and promises, and exhortations has he followed us all our days! How often has he spoken to us in his providential dealings, and how often by his Holy Spirit in our own consciences! yet all in vain: we have turned a deaf ear to every admonition; “we have pulled away the shoulder; we have refused to return” — — — Our Lord may well complain of us, “How often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not!”]

Now all this has greatly aggravated our guilt. As our blessed Lord said of the Jews, “If I had not come unto them and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin,” so it may be said of us: indeed of us it may be said in a peculiar manner, because of the plainness and fidelity with which the whole counsel of God has been for so many years declared unto you: verily we have in that respect been distinguished as Capernaum of old; and may expect to be distinguished also like that city in our punishment, if we continue to abuse the privileges with which we are so highly favoured.]

From the evil which they committed, we proceed to notice,

II. The judgments denounced against them—

Under the Jewish dispensation, the commands of God were enforced with temporal rewards and punishments: but to us he holds forth rather such as are spiritual and eternal. Certain it is that God will put a difference between those who serve him, and those who serve him not.

He will do it in this world—

[The servants of God, as to external things, may be, and for the most part are, in a state inferior to others: nevertheless they have in reality an infinitely better portion than the greatest or happiest of God's enemies. "The very blessings of his enemies are cursed to them," so that "in the midst of their sufficiency they are in straits:" but the Lord's people have even their afflictions sanctified to them, so that they are enabled to "glory in their tribulations," and to "take pleasure in their distresses." They have "meat to eat which the world knows not of:" and so refreshing are their draughts from the Fountain of living waters, that "they never thirst again" for the polluted streams which this world affords. Their minds are tranquil and at ease, whilst "the wicked are like the troubled sea which cannot rest;" *they* live in higher regions, where the storms and tempests of this lower world can scarcely reach; and enjoy in the light of God's countenance a very foretaste of heaven itself— — —]

He will do it in the world to come—

[O! who can conceive how different from that of the ungodly will be the lot of God's servants *there*? The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus will serve to give us some idea of it. *Here* the Rich Man's state appeared to have in it all that was desirable, whilst the destitution of Lazarus was extreme: but how different their condition *there*! the one banqueting at the table of his Lord, and "drinking of the rivers of pleasure which are at God's right hand;" the other wanting "a drop of water to cool his tongue!" the one exalted in glory on his Saviour's throne, and filled with a complete fruition of his God; the other "weeping and wailing, and gnashing his teeth," in anguish, which no words can utter, no imagination can conceive! Verily the words of my text will *then* have their full accomplishment; and *then* shall every soul understand what is comprehended in this sentence, "Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry; behold, my

servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty; behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed; behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who disregard the warnings of their God—

[What excuse have you for this rebellious conduct? Is there any thing unreasonable in his commands? Is he not worthy to be feared, and loved, and served, and honoured? and would not your own happiness be promoted by conforming to his will? — — — Or have you any doubt whether there be a day of future retribution, when “he will give to every man according to his works?” You cannot doubt of this. Why then will you not lay to heart the warnings and the exhortations which he sends to you from time to time? I pray you think of the judgments here denounced against those who are disobedient to his word; and “flee, whilst yet ye may flee, to the refuge that is set before you”— — —]

2. Those who obey him in spirit and in truth—

[We cannot but observe with what peculiar delight God contemplates the happiness of his obedient servants. No less than four times does he repeat the words, “Behold, my servants;” as though he had said, ‘These are the people whom I delight to honour; and the whole universe shall see, that they are above all others the blessed of the Lord.’ To you then I say, think of the blessings which are here accorded to you; and labour night and day to secure them. In particular, consult the sacred records, and see what those things are in which your God delights. Does he delight to honour his only dear Son? Let your whole soul engage in this blessed work, looking to him for all that you want, “receiving every thing out of his fulness,” and devoting yourselves in body, soul, and spirit, to his service. Does God delight in holiness? Seek it in its utmost heights, that ye may “be holy as he is holy, and perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”]

MXXI.

THE NEW HEAVENS AND THE NEW EARTH.

Isai. lxv. 17, 18. *Behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.*

WHEN our blessed Saviour came into the world, his advent was thus announced by angels to some poor shepherds; "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Next to that in point of importance, and next to it as a ground of joy, is the information which I have to communicate to you this day, relative to a new creation, in which that same adorable Saviour will display the full benefits of his redemption, even of that redemption which, at his first advent, he accomplished in the world: "Behold," says God, "I create new heavens, and a new earth." Permit me, then to call your attention to,

I. The glorious prospect that is here set before us—

The language here used is doubtless exceeding strong, more especially when we consider to what an apparently small event it, in the first instance, refers. It refers to the restoration and conversion of God's ancient people, the Jews: "I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy." But, when viewed in its connexion with all its consequences, it will be found to deserve the title here given it, "A creating of new heavens and a new earth."

The event itself will be most glorious—

[*In a temporal view*, it will be great. The Jews, beyond all reasonable doubt, will be restored to their own land; and enjoy there a state of prosperity not known by them even in the most favoured periods of their history^a — — —

In a spiritual view, it will be greater still. Their conversion to God will be attended with a very extraordinary measure of true piety^b — — — In fact, it will eclipse all that was ever known amongst them, unless perhaps amongst a few of their most eminent saints; "for the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound^c." As for former things, though glorious in their day, as the stars in the absence of both sun and moon, yet they shall pass away

^a Compare ver. 20—23. with Amos ix. 13—15. and Isai. lx. 17, 18.

^b Ezek. xxxvi. 24—28. ^c Isai. xxx. 26.

so as no more to be remembered: "The ark of the covenant itself, that peculiar symbol of the divine presence, shall no more be visited by them, or remembered amongst them; Jerusalem itself being the throne of the Lord^d," and "God himself the light and glory thereof^e."]

This may fitly be called "new heavens, and a new earth."—

[So St. Peter calls it, doubtless in reference to this very passage; "We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness^f." And by many it is thought, that to this very period St. John refers, when, in the Apocalyptic vision, he saw it, as it were, accomplished before his eyes: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away: and there was no more sea. And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven; saying, Behold, the Tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them; and they shall be his people; and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, *Behold, I make all things new.* And he said unto me, Write: for all these words are true and faithful^g." Doubtless, in its literal extent, this passage will never be fulfilled till we get to heaven; because, in this world, "death" will continue to reign, till its power shall be destroyed at the resurrection-day. But as the destruction of Jerusalem was a type of the destruction of the wicked in the day of judgment; so will the constructing of the New Jerusalem be a very glorious representation of the felicity of heaven: yea, so bright a picture will the one be of the other, that the same language may well be applied to both, and both be designated as "a creation of new heavens and a new earth."]

And what, think ye, are,

II. The feelings with which it should be contemplated?

God himself declares this great event to be a source of joy even to his own soul: "I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people:" nay, he says, that "he will rejoice over them with joy, he will rest in his

^d The text, with Jer. iii. 16, 17.

^f 2 Pet. iii. 13.

^e Isai. lx. 18, 19.

^g Rev. xxi. 1—5.

love, he will joy over them with singing^h." Surely then it becomes us to rejoice also, yea, and to shout for joy,

1. For the benefits that will be conferred on God's ancient people—

[Long have they been the most degraded and despised of all people. At this very day are they classed with swine, in an impost laid upon them even by Christiansⁱ. But the day is coming when they will be the first and head of all nations; "their righteousness going forth as brightness, and their salvation as a lamp that burneth^k;" and "all their enemies bowing down themselves at the soles of their feet^l." And what is God's command to us in reference to that event? "Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel^m." So, in another place: "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy, all ye that mourn for her; that ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with, the abundance of her gloryⁿ."]]

2. For the benefits that will accrue to the whole world—

[The conversion of the Jews will be the signal for an outpouring of blessings upon the rest of mankind: yea, "it shall be as life from the dead to the whole world^o." And can we contemplate this without the liveliest joy? Turn to the 98th Psalm; and there you will see what ought to be the feelings of universal nature, in the prospect of this great event^p — — —]

3. For the honour that will arise to God himself—

[Then will he be glorified as he never yet was, even from the foundation of the world^q. Then will all his eternal counsels be completed, yea, and all his perfections be glorified. Did God from eternity choose that people to himself? Did he plant them as a beauteous olive for himself? Did he, for

^h ver. 19. with Zeph. iii. 17.

ⁱ At Frankfort, in Germany, there is still (August 1827) a toll paid by them for going over a bridge: and on the ticket which they present is inscribed, "For the passage of Jews and swine." A line is indeed drawn across the word "swine;" but the word is as plain and legible as ever.

^k Isai. lxii. 1.

^l Isai. lx. 14.

^m Isai. xlv. 23.

ⁿ Isai. lxvi. 10, 11. ^o Rom. xi. 12, 15.

^p Ps. xcvi. 1—9.

^q Jer. xxxiii. 9.

their unfruitfulness, break off the branches, and graft us Gentiles in? And will he, in that day, graft in again his afflicted people, and cause the whole tree to flourish in unrivalled beauty to endless ages? Will he thus display before the whole universe the greatness of his power, and the immutability of his grace? I say, then, the prospect of this is a just ground of joy. The angels in heaven contemplate it with joy^r: and we also should begin that song which shall most assuredly be sung by all the Church on that blessed occasion: "Praise ye the Lord, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the Lord, for he hath done marvellous things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee^s."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have never yet tasted of this joy—

[How many, alas! are there of this description! On account of personal and national benefits, you all have, at some time, rejoiced: but, in the prospects we have been contemplating, you have taken no interest. The conversion of one single soul fills all the angels in heaven with delight; but the conversion and salvation of millions is passed over by you, as unworthy of a thought. See, then, how unlike ye are to the character of real saints, and how little ye resemble God! Indeed, indeed, if ye continue so regardless of the happiness of God's Church below, ye can have no hope of participating in the blessedness of his Church above.]

2. Those who have reason to hope that this new creation is already begun in them—

["Every true Christian is, in fact, a new creation^t:" he is "God's workmanship," as truly as the material heavens are^u. Then I appeal to you, whether you have not found occasion for joy in your own soul? Is it no ground for joy that you have obtained reconciliation with God through the blood of his dear Son; and a renovation of your souls through the operation of his Holy Spirit? Or rather, I must ask, Have you not, "by believing in Christ, been brought to rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and glorified^x?" Then I need not urge *you* to forward this same blessed work in the souls of others: you need only be shewn how you may be instrumental in diffusing through the world the knowledge of Christ, and you will of yourselves be ready to employ all that you have, and all that you are, in this blessed cause^y.]

^r Rev. xi. 15—17.

^s Isai. xii. 4—6.

^t 2 Cor. v. 17.

^u Eph. ii. 10.

^x 1 Pet. i. 8.

^y 2 Cor. viii. 1—4.

MXXII.

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

Isai. lxxv. 24. *It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.*

THERE is scarcely any thing less justly appreciated than the efficacy of prayer. As a Christian community, we acknowledge the duty of prayer; but we regard it rather as a service to be performed by us, than as a privilege conferred by God. In public worship, we are satisfied with making the responses that are put into our mouths, without ever endeavouring to obtain and exercise a frame of mind suited to them: decency, rather than fervour, is the object of our pursuit; and when we have gone through the course prescribed by the Church, we think we have performed a service acceptable to God, though in no single petition have we truly poured out our soul before him. In many instances, if God were to take us at our word, and to offer to grant us the petitions we have presented to him, we should pray them back again with tenfold greater earnestness than was felt in their first delivery. If any person would read carefully the various petitions in the Litany, and compare them with the habitual desires of his heart, he would gain an insight into the state of his soul before God, even such an insight as at present he has no conception of^a. But prayer is, in reality, an instrument of great power: it can, under any circumstances, bring Omnipotence to our aid: yea, so acceptable is it to Almighty God, that even the disposition to offer it shall not be overlooked: but “it shall come to pass,” provided we are truly sincere, “that before we call, he will answer; and whilst we are yet speaking, he will hear.”

To enter into the full import of this promise, we should consider,

^a What *worldly* man, when uttering these words, “From all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, Good Lord, deliver us,” really means what he says?

I. To whom it is made—

To the Millennial period, in the first instance, it most undoubtedly refers—

[The whole preceding context clearly shews this. In the beginning of the chapter, God denounces the heaviest judgments against his “rebellious people.” But, having determined not utterly to destroy them, he says, “As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it; so will I do for my servants’ sakes, that I may not destroy them all^b” — — — Then, having contrasted in very strong terms the felicity of the faithful with the misery of those who shall have provoked him to anger, he proceeds to declare, that the whole nation, yea, and the whole world also, shall be restored to his favour, and enjoy a degree of prosperity unknown to his people, even in the most distinguished periods of their history. So great shall be the change on earth, that it shall be as if “new heavens and a new earth were created:” and all former seasons, whether of prosperity or adversity, shall be forgotten, as being altogether lost in the contemplation of their present bliss^c. Holiness and happiness will then reign throughout all the Church, without intermission and without alloy^d. His Jewish people shall no more be subjected to the judgments that have been inflicted on them. Instead of being cut off in the midst of their days, their lives shall be so prolonged, that a person of a hundred years of age shall be accounted but an infant; and if cut off at that age, he shall be regarded as having prematurely perished under the displeasure of an angry God. Both they and their offspring shall be so blessed of the Lord, as to bear in every respect the marks of his special favour; and, above all, their communion with him shall be most sweet and intimate, and their communications from him most rich and abundant^e.]

But it also belongs to the Church of God in all ages—

[The prophets speak of this privilege as belonging to the saints in their days. David, in his Psalms, is full of this subject: “The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth: He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he will also hear their cry, and will save them^f.” The Prophet Isaiah says, “Thou shalt call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here I am^g.” To the same effect, the Prophet Jeremiah also speaks:

^b ver. 8—10. ^c ver. 17. ^d ver. 18, 19. with 2 Pet. iii. 13.

^e ver. 20—25. with Rev. xxi. 1—4.

^f Ps. cxlv. 18, 19.

^g Isai. lviii. 9.

“Ye shall call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart^h.”

Of the instances of such gracious communications there would be no end, if I were to attempt to enumerate all that are recorded in the Scriptures. Let one suffice, even that of Daniel, when he set himself, by prayer and supplication, to obtain of God an insight into the prophecies of Jeremiah relative to the termination of the seventy years' captivity in Babylon. He gives us the account of himself: “*While I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin, and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God; yea, while I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth: and I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision^l.*” And again, in the following chapter, the angel says to him, “Fear not, Daniel; for *from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard; and I am come for thy words^k.*”

And speaks not the New Testament the same language also? Were these privileges so richly enjoyed under the Jewish dispensation; and are they denied to us? No: we may “ask what we will;” and be sure of being heard^l. Both God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ will esteem themselves “glorified” in granting our petitions, and doing for us whatsoever we ask^m. We have only to “believe that the petitions shall be granted,” and not one of them shall be offered in vainⁿ. Of this, I say, we may possess the fullest confidence^o: and if, “our joy be not full,” the fault is altogether our own^p; since God, by repeated asseverations, has assured us that we shall not ask in vain^q. Even at the moment that we are praying, will he often manifest the acceptance of our prayers^r, and “do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we either ask or think^s.” What wilt thou that I should do for thee? is, in fact, our Lord's address to us all; and he only waits to see the desire of his blessings formed in our hearts, as the signal for pouring out upon us all the riches of his grace.]

^h Jer. xxix. 12, 13.

ⁱ Dan. ix. 20—23.

^k Dan. x. 12.

^l John xv. 7.

^m John xiv. 13, 14.

ⁿ Mark xi. 24.

^o 1 John v. 14, 15.

^p John xvi. 24.

^q Matt. vii. 7, 8.

^r Acts iv. 31.

^s Eph. iii. 20.

Seeing, then, that the promise is made to God's people in every age, let us consider,

II. What it speaks to us—

It plainly declares,

1. How wonderful is the condescension of Almighty God—

[When God promised to dwell in the temple which Solomon had built, the pious monarch exclaimed, "Will God in very deed dwell with man on the earth?" And well may we utter a similar exclamation, in reference to the subject before us: "Will God indeed hear and answer the prayers of such insignificant and sinful worms as we?" To this I answer, that he surely will: nor shall the meanest or most unworthy suppliant in the universe be spurned from his footstool. "Though he is high above all creatures, yet will he have respect unto the lowly." Yes, "though he is the High and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, yet will he dwell with him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite:" nor shall all the angels in heaven so occupy his attention, but that "he will look through all their shining ranks to the poor and contrite man, who trembles at his word." Nor is it the *prayer* only of the contrite that he will listen to; he will not despise their *desire*: their very sighs shall enter into his ears, and their tears be treasured up in his vials. What amazing condescension is this! Were it but an earthly monarch that so humbled himself, the whole world would sound with his praises: but He, of whom these things are spoken, is King of kings, and Lord of lords. What praises, then, should we render unto him? Never will his grace be fully appreciated, till we shall see the infinite distance which there is between him and us, and the unworthiness of those to whom this mercy is vouchsafed.]

2. How inconceivable is the folly of prayerless men—

[Thousands, who imagine that they pray, do nothing but deceive their own souls. For what is their prayer, but a solemn mockery of their God? Let those who never pray, but according to some form which they either read out of a book or repeat from memory, inquire what has been the frame of their minds in prayer; and they will find that they have, for the most part, "drawn nigh to God with their lips, whilst their hearts have been far from him." I mean not to say that persons may not pray *with*, as truly and fervently as *without*, a form: for they who have ever entered into the spirit of the

Liturgy, know the contrary. But no real saint ever lived without pouring out before God, from time to time, many "cries and breathings" which proceeded from the state of his own mind, and which no written form could have furnished. And if this be not our habit, we are as truly prayerless, as if we had never used even an outward form. Let me then ask of such persons, Have you no sins to confess to God? no mercies to implore? no blessings to be thankful for? or have you any other source from whence you can derive the blessings you stand in need of? Ah! think how soon the season for prayer will be for ever past; and how vain even the most importunate supplications will soon be, though you should pray only for a drop of water to cool your tongue. Be in earnest, I pray you, and no longer deceive your own souls. Our Lord tells you, that the mere formalist worships him in vain." And if you will only candidly examine the state and habit of your souls when at a throne of grace, you shall attain a deep insight into your real character, and shall know, with great precision, the doom that awaits you in the eternal world. What will be your feelings in that world, when you reflect, that when all heaven was offered you, you would not so much as ask for it! How will the poor ignorant heathen condemn you, when their labours in the pursuit of happiness shall be recounted, and your reluctance even to offer a prayer shall be adduced against you! See the papist, with all his penances and mortifications; will not he also condemn you? See but a beggar, in the pursuit of relief for his body; how urgent! how importunate! how averse to take a denial. Shall not he also rise up in judgment against you? Verily, the bitterest reflection in hell itself will be, that, when the Lord Jesus Christ had purchased heaven for you by his blood, and offered it to you freely in answer to your prayers, you deemed the task too heavy, and the terms too hard. May God in his mercy save you from such bitter reflections as these! And may it never be said of you, in relation to the heavenly glory, "They had it not, because they asked it not."]

3. How truly blessed are they who live nigh unto their God in prayer—

[*They* understand the subject, and can bear witness to the truth of God in relation to it. Often have they gone to a throne of grace oppressed with their sins, which, like an insupportable burthen, sink them to the earth: but God has sustained them, and given them "rest unto their souls." They went contemplating nothing but continued and perhaps augmented sorrows; and, "ere they were aware, their souls are made like the chariots of Ammi-nadib^t:" "even before

^t Cant. vi. 12.

they called, he answered; and while they were yet speaking, he heard." Know ye, then, your privilege: Carry to the Lord your every want, your every fear; and "cast all your care on him, who careth for you." "Commit your way to him, and" not only shall your trials be alleviated, but "your very thoughts," the most variable things under the whole heaven, "shall be established." "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord;" and they who possess it, enjoy a heaven upon earth. Go on, then, improving daily your liberty of access to God; and spread before him all your wants, and "make known with confidence your requests unto him:" so shall "the peace of God now rule your hearts," and "God himself be your portion, and your eternal great reward."]

MXIII.

THE POOR AND CONTRITE THE OBJECTS OF GOD'S FAVOUR.

Isai. lxvi. 2. *To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.*

IT often happens that accidental distinctions serve men as grounds of confidence towards God. Many found their hopes on no better basis than Micah did^a: the Jews in particular thought themselves assured of the Divine favour because of God's residence in their temple^b. But God shews them the folly of their notions^c, and declares the character of those who alone shall be considered by him with any favourable regard:

I. Who are the objects of the Divine favour—

Men choose for their companions the rich and gay; but those whom God regards are of a very different character—

1. *They feel themselves destitute of all good—*

[It is not temporal, but spiritual poverty, that distinguishes God's people. They have discovered their total want of

^a Judg. xvii. 13.

^b Hence that common boast among them, Jer. vii. 4.

^c ver. 1, 2. The import of which is, How can you think that I, an infinite Being, who myself created those things of which you boast, can be allured by an earthly structure to continue my presence among you, if you persist in your evil ways?

spiritual wisdom^d. They are constrained to acknowledge that they have no *righteousness* of their own^e, and that they are "without *strength*" for obedience^f. They unfeignedly adopt the language of St. Paul^g— Nor do they hope for mercy but as the *free gift* of God^h.]

2. They bewail the many evils they have committed—

[They have been made to see that sin is hateful to God; and they have felt the bitterness of it in their own consciences. They know experimentally the sensations of Davidⁱ. They lothe themselves for all their abominations^k. Nor are their convictions merely occasional or transient; they are *habitually* of a tender and "contrite spirit."]

3. They pay a reverential regard to every word of God—

[They dare not say like the idolatrous Jews^l— They rather resemble the man after God's own heart^m. If the word be preached, they "receive it as the word, not of man, but of God." They hear the *threatenings* like the meek Josiahⁿ. They attend to the *promises* with an eager desire to embrace them. To every *precept* they listen with an obedient ear^o.]

These, though generally considered by the world as weak and superstitious, are not overlooked by the Supreme Being.

II. The peculiar regard which God shews them—

The "eyes of God are in every place beholding the evil and the good;" but he "looks to" *these*, in a far different manner from *others*. This distinguishing favour implies,

1. Approbation of them—

[From the proud and self-sufficient God turns his face^p; but he "despises not the broken and contrite in heart^q." Though so exalted in himself, he will not disdain to notice them. His approbation of such characters stands recorded for

^d Prov. xxx. 2, 3.

^e Isai. lxix. 6.

^f Rom. v. 6. 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^g Rom. vii. 18.

^h They say not, like the servant, Matt. xviii. 26. but desire to experience the clemency shewn to insolvent debtors, Luke vii. 42.

ⁱ Ps. xxxviii. 4, 6, 8.

^k Ezek. xxxvi. 31.

^l Jer. xlv. 16.

^m Ps. cxix. 161.

ⁿ 2 Chron. xxxiv. 19, 27.

^o Like Cornelius, Acts x. 33. and Paul, Acts xxii. 10. yea, the angels in heaven, Ps. ciii. 20.

^p Jam. iv. 6.

^q Ps. li. 17.

ever^r. His reception of the prodigal is an eternal monument of the regard he will shew to *every* repenting sinner.]

2. Care over them—

[Wherever they go, his eye is upon them for good^s. He watches them in order to deliver them from danger^t. He watches them in order to comfort them in trouble^u. He watches them in order to relieve them in want^x. He watches them in order to exalt them to happiness and honour^y.]

3. Delight in them—

[There are none on earth so pleasing to God as broken-hearted sinners. Their sighs and groans are as music in his ears^z. Their tears he treasures up in his vial^a. He dwells with them as his dearest friends^b. He rejoices over them as a people in whom he greatly delights^c. He saves them *here* by the unceasing exercise of his power^d; and reserves for them *hereafter* an inheritance in heaven^e.]

Nor shall the fewness of such characters render them at all less the objects of God's regard—

[It must be acknowledged that they are but few. But if there were only *one* in the whole world, God would find him out^f. Not all the splendour of heaven, nor all the acclamations of angels, should for a moment divert God's attention from him. Though he were despised by all the human race, yet should he be amiable in the eyes of his Maker. Nor should he want any thing in time or eternity. Never shall that declaration in any instance be falsified^g—]

INFER—

1. How should we admire the condescension of God!—

[If we view only the material world we may well stand astonished that God should regard such an insignificant creature as man^h. But, if we contemplate the majesty of God, we cannot but exclaim with Solomonⁱ— Let then the declaration in the text lead our thoughts up to God. Let us adore him for so clearly describing the objects of his favour. And let us express our admiration in the words of David^k—]

2. How should we desire to attain the character that is pleasing to God!—

^r Luke xviii. 13, 14.

^s 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

^t Ps. xii. 5.

^u Ps. cxlvii. 3.

^x Isai. xli. 17, 18.

^y 1 Sam. ii. 8.

^z Ps. cii. 19, 20.

^a Ps. lvi. 8.

^b Isai. lvii. 15.

^c Zeph. iii. 12, 17.

^d Ps. xxxiv. 15, 18.

^e Matt. v. 3.

^f "To this *man*, &c. even to *him*," &c.

^g Ps. cxxxviii. 6.

^h Ps. viii. 3, 4.

ⁱ 1 Kings viii. 27.

^k Ps. cxiii. 5—8.

[The poor and contrite are *exclusively* beloved of God. If he look on others, it is only as he did on the Egyptians^l. And how dreadful must it be to have *such* an enemy! But how delightful to have an *almighty*, *omnipresent* guardian! Above all, how awful must it be to have *him turn his face from us* in the day of judgment! Let us then endeavour to humble ourselves before God^m. And rest assured that the promised mercy shall in due time be fulfilled to usⁿ.]

^l Exod. xiv. 24, 25. ^m Isai. ii. 11.

ⁿ Jam. iv. 10.

MXIV.

GOD DELIGHTS TO COMFORT HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. lxvi. 10—13. *Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her: that ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem.*

IT is the peculiar character of the Lord's people, that they enter into the concerns of the Church, rejoicing in her prosperity, and lamenting whatever tends to her dishonour. For both these exercises of mind there is occasion in every place and in every age. If but one soul be added to the Church, it is a ground of joy even to the angels in heaven, and much more to those whose hands are strengthened by every such accession: on the other hand, the low state of the Church must of necessity fill every pious soul with grief and shame. But there is a time approaching, when the grounds of joy will greatly preponderate, when there will be a vast increase of glory to the Church, when innumerable multitudes both of Jews and Gentiles shall flock to her standard, and "her peace shall flow down like a river." It is of this period that the prophet is speaking, both in this and the preceding chapter: and so sudden will be its arrival, that it will seem as if "a nation were born in

a day." To this period we should look forward with joy: and whatever occasions there may be for sorrow, on account of existing circumstances, the prospect of such a glorious event should fill us with heavenly consolation.

That we may enter more fully into the exhortation in our text, we shall set before you,

I. A general view of the consolations which God has prepared for his people—

God delights in the character of a comforter: he calls himself "The Comforter of all them that are cast down:" yea, each person of the ever-blessed Trinity is expressly designated by this title: "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort^a:" The Lord Jesus is "the Consolation of Israel^b:" and the Holy Spirit is yet more particularly made known to us as "The Comforter, (that *other* Comforter,) whom the Father will send to us in Christ's name^c." And well is God set forth under this character, since he has prepared most abundant and "everlasting consolation" for us,

1. In the work and offices of his Son—

[What is there which fallen man can want, that is not treasured up for us in the Lord Jesus Christ? Are we ignorant, guilty, polluted, and enslaved? "Christ is of God made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption^d:" he is a *Priest*, on purpose to make atonement for us; a *Prophet*, on purpose to teach us by his word and Spirit; a *King*, on purpose that he may rule over us and in us. In a word, there is "all fulness treasured up in Him^e," in order that we may "receive out of His fulness grace for grace^f." Hence the Apostle, assuming it as an obvious and acknowledged truth, urges it as a motive to universal love; "If there be *any consolation in Christ*, fulfil ye my joy," being all in perfect unity with each other^g.]

2. In the fulness and stability of his covenant—

[The "everlasting covenant," which from all eternity was made between the Father and the Son, was "ordered in all

^a 2 Cor. i. 3.

^b Luke ii. 25.

^c John xiv. 16, 26.

^d 1 Cor. i. 30.

^e Col. i. 19.

^f John i. 16.

^g Phil. ii. 1, 2.

things and sure^h.” There is not any thing we desire, but there is the most abundant provision made for it by many and repeated promises, all of which he has confirmed to us by the most solemn oath. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! Jehovah covenants; Jehovah swears! And wherefore does he so condescend to the infirmities of men? Is it to guard against a versatility of mind on his part? No; but to *comfort us* under our fears of his displeasure: “being willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, he confirmed it with an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, *we might have strong consolation*, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold of the hope set before usⁱ.”]

3. In the richness and variety of his ordinances—

[God does not merely *permit* us to approach him, but has *commanded* us to come to his footstool, and to make known to him our requests in every possible situation and circumstance of life. He has appointed ordinances, public, private, social, assuring us, that, if we “draw nigh to him, he will draw nigh to us,” and “do exceeding abundantly for us above all that we can ask or think.” These ordinances are beautifully represented in our text as “breasts of consolation, which we may suck and be satisfied with, yea, from which we may milk out and be delighted with an abundance of glory.” And here let me ask the people of the Lord, Whether God has not “spread for them, as for his people of old, a table in the wilderness;” and abundantly blessed to them the provisions of his house? whether “their weary souls have not been satiated, and their sorrowful souls replenished?” whether in these seasons “light has not often arisen to them in obscurity, and their darkness been made as the noon day?” and especially, whether at the table of the Lord, when they have been feeding on the body and blood of their crucified Saviour, they have not often found “his body to be *bread indeed*, and his blood to be *drink indeed*?” Yes; in reading his word, and in communion with him, the soul enjoys a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined^k;” and those who have most frequented “his banqueting house,” have most found “his banner over them to be love^l.”]

4. In the gifts and trials of his Ministers—

[Various are the gifts with which the Lord endows his servants^m, that he may thereby adapt his word to the necessities of allⁿ: and the particular commission which he gives to every one of them is, “*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people*;

^h 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

ⁱ Heb. vi. 17, 18.

^k Isai. xxv. 6.

^l Cant. ii. 3, 4.

^m 1 Cor. xii. 8—11.

ⁿ Eph. iv. 11—13.

Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem: “Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees, and say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; your God will come and save you^p.” He chooses to speak to us by men, rather than by angels; because they, by their own experience of the bitterness of sin and of the consolations of the Gospel, are able to testify of “the things which they have heard, and seen, and handled^q,” and can speak with tenderness and compassion to others, from a sense of their own great and manifold infirmities^r. It usually happens, too, that those ministers who are made most useful to the Church of God have themselves been brought into deep waters, and been subjected to many trials; God “giving them thereby the tongue of the learned,” and qualifying them to “speak a word in season” to persons in all the varied circumstances of life^s. To this St. Paul ascribes both the trials and consolations which had so greatly abounded in his experience: “God,” says he, “comforteth us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort them which are in *any* trouble with the same comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation^t.”]

But, if we would justly appreciate the consolations prepared for us, let us take,

II. A more particular view of them, as represented in the image before us—

The images in the Holy Scriptures have this distinguished excellence, that they bring home to the comprehension and the feelings of every man truths which are at once the most exalted and most interesting that can be presented to our view. It is quite erroneous to suppose, that, because an image is common, it is therefore unfit to be a vehicle of Divine truth; we should rather say, it is therefore the most proper for illustrating such things as are analogous to it. The idea of a little infant sucking at his mother's breast, and borne in her arms, on her side, or dandled on her knees, may seem unworthy to express the love

^p Isai. xl. 1, 2.

^q Isai. xxxv. 3, 4. See also, particularly in this view, Isai. lxi. 1—3.

^r 1 John i. 1.

^r Heb. v. 1, 2.

^s Isai. l. 4.

^t 2 Cor. i. 4—6. This passage is worthy of very particular attention, especially in the view in which it is here adduced.

of Jehovah towards his people; yet will we assert, that the whole creation does not present an image that will more adequately convey this sentiment to our minds. It suggests to us,

1. His attention to our wants—

[How great and manifold are the wants of a little child; no one of which he himself is able to supply! but his mother provides for every one of them, and anticipates them even before he is brought into the world. In like manner, the number of our wants is only equalled by the extent of our helplessness: we are not of ourselves able to do any thing good, nor “to speak a good word,” no, nor even “to think a good thought.” But our God has promised “to supply all our wants, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus^u.” “He knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him;” and he has engaged, that, “though the lions may lack and suffer hunger, they who fear him shall want no manner of thing that is good:” he will give them “grace to help them in every time of need,” and “his grace shall be sufficient for them.”]

2. His sympathy with us in our troubles—

[Through diseases of various kinds, and accidents almost innumerable, the days of infancy afford much scope for the exercise of parental tenderness and affection. And where is the mother whose bowels have not frequently yearned over her afflicted offspring? How has the sudden cry of her infant pierced her soul, even as with a sword! Yet is this but a very faint image of the tenderness and compassion of our God. In reference to his people of old, it is said, “His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel^x,” and “in all their afflictions he was afflicted^y.” So now, if any presume to injure them, God says, “He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye^z.” Our Divine Master identifies himself with his people, and regards every thing that is done to them, whether good or evil, as done unto himself: if they be persecuted, it is *HE* that is smitten^a; or if they have kindness ministered unto them, it is *HE* that is relieved^b. One member of the body does not more participate the feelings of the rest, than *he* does the trials and troubles of his redeemed people: indeed, he submitted to be “made in all things like unto them, on purpose that he might, as our faithful and compassionate High Priest,” be stimulated, as it were, from his own experience, to pity and relieve his tempted people^c.]

^u Phil. iv. 19.

^x Judg. x. 16.

^y Isai. lxiii. 9.

^z Zech. ii. 8.

^a Acts ix. 4.

^b Matt. xxv. 15.

^c Heb. ii. 17, 18. and iv. 15.

3. His forbearance towards us in our perverseness—

[Few things perhaps are more trying to the temper than the untowardness of a perverse child: it requires all the love of a parent to support it, when it is great and of long continuance. But what parent ever had to endure a thousandth part of the perverseness which our God has seen in us; seen too in the midst of all his kindness? No one can read the history of Israel in the wilderness without being amazed at the multitude of their provocations, and at the patience with which “God suffered their manners forty years:” yet this is a just representation of human nature, in every place, and every age. Of the very best amongst us it may be said, that “he falleth seven times a day:” yea, “in many things we offend all.” But God “does not deal with us after our sins, nor reward us according to our iniquities:” on the contrary, “he spareth, when we deserve punishment;” “he keepeth mercy for thousands,” who, alas! would soon cast it away; “he forgiveth iniquity, transgression, and sin;” and, if constrained to chasten us with the rod, he “does not suffer his whole displeasure to arise,” but chastises in mercy only, and “does not utterly take away his loving-kindness from us.”]

4. His affectionate endearments—

[It is well known with what delight a mother will “bear her” infant in her arms, and “dandle him on her knees:” and it should seem as if this were an extravagant representation of the Saviour’s love to us: but he “bare his people, and carried them all the days of old:” even “as an eagle beareth on her wings” her unfledged offspring, so does he now “carry the lambs in his bosom, and gently lead them that are with young.” It is, if we may so speak, a delight to him to “manifest himself to them” in the most endearing manner; to “lift up the light of his countenance upon them;” to “kiss them with the kisses of his lips,” and to “shed abroad his love in their hearts by the Holy Ghost.” He accounts them “his jewels,” and “his peculiar treasure;” and “rejoices over them, to do them good” in every possible way. Not all the endearments of the tenderest mother can exceed the exercises of his mind towards us, as described by an inspired prophet: “The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty: he will save: he will *rejoice over thee with joy*: he will *rest in his love*: he will *joy over thee with singing*^d.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are strangers to our Jerusalem—

[It is generally thought amongst you, that there is no happiness in religion. But, I would ask, Where else is it to

^d Zeph. iii. 17.

be found? You may go and search for it through the whole creation in vain: "The depth saith, It is not in me; and the sea saith, It is not in me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof:" it is in Christ only that the nations of the earth either are, or can be, blessed. If it be said, that religion has its peculiar trials; we acknowledge readily, that it has: but if it bring trials, it affords comforts also to counterbalance them: indeed the very word "comfort" necessarily implies in it somewhat of previous pain or trouble. Sorrow for sin, the mortification of our in-dwelling corruptions, the enduring of contempt and reproach for Christ's sake, may all be considered as painful in themselves; but none ever took "this yoke" upon them, without finding it, after a season, both "light and easy;" and being enabled at last to take pleasure, and to glory, in those very trials, which appear so formidable to unenlightened men^f. But if you wish to be happy and yet hold fast your sins, *that* is impossible: as the tenderest mother in the universe cannot make her child happy, whilst he is under the influence of perverse and wicked dispositions, so neither can God himself make you happy, whilst you are living in disobedience to any one of his commands. There must of necessity be a difference between a duteous and a disobedient child: to the one a wise mother will impart many testimonies of her regard, which she is constrained to withhold from the other. So it is with God: he manifests himself to his faithful people as he does not unto the world: and if we would but walk before him as obedient children, he would give us a foretaste of heaven itself, in the light of his countenance, and in the tokens of his love. Were this duly considered, we should no longer be content to live as "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel," but should seek to become "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."]

2. Those who love and mourn for her—

[Your concern for the welfare of the Church is a hopeful evidence that you have received the word of God in truth; for it is the characteristic mark of all true saints, that "they prefer Jerusalem above their chief joy." But, whilst you are concerned about the Church at large, you must not forget, that you yourselves constitute a part of that Church, and that the other members of this great family will rejoice or mourn, according as you walk worthy, or unworthy, of your high calling. The comfort of God's children depends, not only on the manifestations of his favour, but on the state of the Church around them. What tears did David shed on account of those who kept not God's law! and how did Paul feel, as it were,

^e Job xxviii. 14, 15.

^f 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

all the pangs of travail renewed in his soul, when the misconduct of some in the Galatian Church caused him to stand in doubt of them! On the other hand, no words could express the joy which John, the beloved disciple, felt, “when he saw his children walk in truth.” Be watchful then over your whole spirit and conduct; and see that they be such as become the Gospel of Christ. On this the honour of your heavenly Parent depends: on this also depend the manifestations of his love to your souls. Only seek that God may be glorified in you; and then shall thanksgivings abound towards him on your account: your own “peace also shall flow down like a river,” and the prosperity of Zion be greatly increased.]

MXXV.

THE JEWS TO CONVERT THE GENTILES.

Isai. lxvi. 18—20. *It shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory. And I will set a sign among them; and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord, out of all nations, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the Lord, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the House of the Lord.*

WHEN we look upon the world around us, and consider how utterly God is neglected and despised by the great mass of his intelligent creatures, and that successive generations of immortal beings are swept away without any knowledge of a Saviour, or any hope of beholding the face of God in peace, we are ready to say with the prophet, “Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep night and day^a,” for the dishonour done to my God, and for the miseries which, like a relentless deluge, are overwhelming the whole earth! It is however a consolation to know, that this state of things is drawing to a close, and that a new era is about to appear, when the darkness which now covers the earth shall be dispelled, and righteousness reign,

^a Jer. ix. 1.

where sin hath hitherto maintained an undisputed sway. The prospect of this period, which is now fast approaching, and speedily to commence, was the great support of the Church under the distresses to which she was reduced in the Babylonish captivity; and it still forms the richest source of consolation to all who have any zeal for God, or any concern for the welfare of mankind. So impressed was the prophet Isaiah with his views of this mighty change, that he could scarcely speak of any thing else: or, if he did speak of the restoration of the Jews from Babylon, or of the blessings treasured up for them by the introduction of the Messiah's kingdom, he constantly interwove in his statements such grand and glorious expressions, as could not fail of carrying forward the minds of his readers to this blessed time, when "new heavens and a new earth were to be created^b," and the universal empire of righteousness to be established throughout the earth. Of this period he speaks in the words before us; which will lead me to set before you,

I. God's purpose respecting the Gentile world—

"It shall come to pass, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory." This is the fixed purpose of Jehovah; a purpose,

1. Proclaimed by all the prophets—

[Respecting "the gathering of the nations" to Christ, there is but one voice, from the time of Abraham to the close of the sacred canon. Christ is that "Seed in whom all the nations of the earth are to be blessed^c;" that "Shiloh, to whom the gathering of all people shall be^d." "The utmost ends of the earth are promised to Him for his possession^e:" "all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall do him service^f;" "from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof shall his name be great among the Gentiles^g;" and all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ^h."

But there is a peculiarity in this prophecy which must not be overlooked. God has in the great work of redemption

^b ver. 22.

^c Gen. xviii. 18.

^d Gen. xlix. 10.

^e Ps. ii. 8.

^f Ps. lxxii. 11.

^g Mal. i. 11.

^h Rev. xi. 15.

revealed his glory to mankind. In that he has shewn how “mercy and truth could meet together, and righteousness and peace could kiss each other¹.” There he has proclaimed his name as “merciful and gracious, and yet as not by any means clearing the guilty^k.” It is this harmony of his perfections that chiefly constitutes his glory. Previous to the revelation of his Gospel, the highest archangel could not have conceived how God could be “a just God, and yet a Saviour^l.” But in Christ Jesus the whole difficulty is solved. By sending him into the world, and laying our iniquities on him, the fullest demands of justice are satisfied, and a way is opened for the richest exercise of mercy towards a guilty world: the truth of God which was pledged for the execution of all his threatenings, is preserved; and yet may the sinner, who was obnoxious to them, be absolved, and be restored to the enjoyment of his forfeited inheritance. This is the mystery in which all the glory of the Godhead shines; and which all the nations of the earth shall in due time have revealed to them in its meridian splendour. This is fully declared by the prophet in a preceding chapter: “Arise, shine! for thy light is come; and *the glory of the Lord* is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and *his glory shall be seen upon thee*. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising^m.” And the prophet Habakkuk also marks it with peculiar precision: “The earth,” says he, “shall be filled with *the knowledge of the glory of the Lord*, as the waters cover the sea.”]

2. Assuredly to be fulfilled in its season—

[Were we to judge by present appearances, we should say, that such an event could never be accomplished. But so we should have thought respecting the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt, and from Babylon; and of the establishment of Christianity by the ministry of a few poor fishermen. But it is not in this way that we are to form our judgment or our expectations. We have only to ask ourselves; “Has God promised these things? and, Is he able to perform them?” These points being ascertained, we are as sure of the event, as if we already saw it before our eyes: for “God is not a man that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should repent.” In fact, the prophet did, as it were, behold it actually accomplishing in his day: he saw the Gentile world “flying to Christ, as doves to their windows;” and he called upon the Church to rejoice in it: “Break forth into joy; sing together, ye waste places

¹ Ps. lxxxv. 10.

¹ Isai. xlv. 21.

^k Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

^m Isai. lx. 1—3. and lxii. 2.

of Jerusalem: for the Lord *hath comforted* his people; he *hath redeemed* Jerusalem: the Lord *hath made bare* his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations: and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our Godⁿ."]

If the purpose itself fill us with wonder, we shall be no less amazed when we are informed of,

II. The instruments by whom he will effect it—

It was by the ministry of Jews that God was pleased to bring in the first fruits of the Gentiles; and by the ministry of the Jews will he gather in the whole harvest. In this passage the prophet distinctly states who are,

1. The persons ordained to this work—

[They are here designated as "those who have escaped unto the nations:" and who these are there can be no doubt. They are the remnant of the Jewish nation dispersed throughout the world°. What the particular places are amongst which they are scattered, it is not necessary to determine: it is sufficient to know, that they are countries widely distant from each other, and countries "which have not heard of the Redeemer's fame, or seen his glory." Amongst these nations shall "an ensign be raised" by the Jews, whom "*God has sent to them*" for this express purpose: and it is by their ministry that God will diffuse the knowledge of salvation amongst them. The language here used is clear and decisive: "I will send those that escape of them," that is, the Jews; "*I will send them unto the nations*; and THEY SHALL DECLARE MY GLORY AMONG THE GENTILES." How little has the Christian world adverted to this prophecy! How little have any of us, when perhaps we have been pouring contempt upon the Jews, recollected for what glorious purposes they are reserved, and what a blessing they are ordained to be to the whole world! Be it known unto you, Brethren, that THE JEWS are the persons ordained of God to "declare his glory among the Gentiles." They themselves are at present as unconscious of the end for which they are so dispersed, as the Gentiles are amongst whom they are scattered: but they shall nevertheless infallibly execute the office for which they are designed. The prophet Micah says of them, "The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men^p." Now the clouds know not the end

ⁿ Isai. lii. 9, 10. with lx. 4, 8.

^o See Isai. iv. 2.

^p Mic. v. 7.

for which God sends them over the face of the earth; nor is the dew aware of the purpose which God has designed it to effect: but both the one and the other infallibly and effectually execute the purposes of heaven, and cause the parched ground to send forth its fruits. So shall the Jews do, when once the light has burst in upon their minds; and “the receiving of them into the Christian Church shall be as life from the dead” to the whole world^a.]

2. The success that shall attend their labours—

[As the effects of rain are rapid on the whole vegetable creation, so shall the fruits of their ministry among the Gentiles be rapid and abundant; “They shall bring all their Gentile brethren for an offering unto the Lord, out of all nations, saith the Lord; as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord.” The meat-offering consisted of fine flour unleavened, and mingled with oil: oil also was poured upon it, and frankincense put thereon^r. Of how many myriads of particles an handful of flour consisted, we know not: but it very fitly represents the congregated masses of believers that shall then be presented to the Lord, all of them pure and unleavened, and all of them sanctified by the Holy Ghost. This is the very construction which St. Paul himself puts upon the text, which he represents as *in part* fulfilled in himself, who was, in a more peculiar manner than any other of the Apostles, “the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, *ministering the Gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost*.” Nor let it be thought that this is a fanciful interpretation: for the prophet himself, in a foregoing chapter, represents the converts as “a cloud^t,” which, whether it be understood of dust, or of rain, conveys precisely the same idea as we have just suggested from the meat-offering: and the Psalmist also places the matter in exactly the same view, when he says, that “the handful of corn cast by them upon the tops of the mountains shall grow up as the woods of Lebanon, and as the piles of grass upon the earth^u.” Indeed the prophet himself uses in another place a still stronger figure: for he represents the Gentile world at that period as “flowing (contrary to nature), like a mighty river, *up to the Lord’s House*, when established upon the top of the highest mountains^x,” so powerful, so harmonious, so universal shall be the concourse of the Gentiles to Mount Zion, in consequence of God’s blessing on the labours of their Jewish instructors.]

^a Rom. xi. 15.

^r Lev. ii. 1—6.

^s Rom. xv. 16.

^t Isai. lx. 8.

^u Ps. lxxii. 16.

^x Isai. ii. 2.

SEE then,

1. Of what importance the conversion of the Jews is to the whole world!

[Many individuals may be, and are, converted from among the Gentiles by the labours of Gentile teachers; and we do well to exert ourselves in every possible way for the diffusion of Christian knowledge amongst them. But though we may reap the first-fruits, the gathering in of the harvest is reserved for labourers of the Jewish community. There is a passage which is supposed to establish a directly opposite opinion: but the passage itself is quite misunderstood. It is said, that “blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in^y:” and from thence it is supposed, that the whole of the Gentiles must be converted, before that blindness is removed from the Jewish people. But in another part of the same chapter it is said, that, as the diminishing of the Jews was the means of enriching the Gentile world, much more shall their fulness be so; the receiving of the Jews into the Church being the signal for, and the means of, a spiritual resurrection to the whole Gentile world^z. The “fulness” in both places imports, not the *complete* ingathering of all, but *the commencement* of that mighty work. It will *begin* among the Gentiles (as it has indeed already begun); and then it will proceed among the Jews, who shall carry it on, and perfect it, among the Gentiles. *As soon as the Jews determinately rejected the Gospel*, it was preached unto the Gentiles^a: and as soon as the Gentiles begin in any considerable numbers to embrace the faith of Christ, we hope and believe, that God will make known himself unto the Jews, and make them the instruments of converting the whole world. If then we have any concern for the Gentile world, we should labour with all our might (in prayer, and in the use of all suitable means) to impart the Gospel to the Jews; that so they may be ready to execute the work to which they are ordained, and for which they are fitted beyond any other people upon the face of the earth. As having their own Scriptures (upon which ours are founded) with them, and as understanding the languages of the different countries wherein they dwell, they are ready at any moment to preach the Gospel to those around them, as soon as ever “the veil shall be taken from their own hearts.” Being acquainted with their own Scriptures, they will unlock the mysteries contained in ours, the very instant that “the key of knowledge” is put into their hands. And their conversion will itself be such a confirmation of prophecy, that all will be ready to receive their word, and to obey the

^y Rom. xi. 25.

^z Rom. xi. 12, 15.

^a Acts xiii. 45—47.

Gospel delivered by them. Let us therefore arise to our long-neglected duty ; and “ neither rest ourselves, nor give rest unto our God,” till he call in his banished children, and make Jerusalem once more a praise in the earth ^b.]

2. What are those points to which we must particularly attend in our own conversion—

[The Jews are to “ declare God’s glory among the Gentiles,” and to “ offer them up as an holy offering unto the Lord.” These are the two essential points of conversion ; and if either be wanting in us, we can never behold the face of God in peace. We must have light in our understandings, and holiness in our hearts. The first thing in the old creation was light ; and that also is the first in the new : “ God, who created light out of darkness, must shine into our hearts, to give us the light of *the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*.” This is not a mere speculative knowledge ; but such a view of God’s glory, as leads immediately to a willing surrender of our souls to him, “ as a living sacrifice^d.” The two must go together, as the root and the fruit. They are absolutely inseparable. We never can devote ourselves unreservedly to God, till we feel our obligations to him for all the wonders of redeeming love : but if once we have right views of Christ, “ we shall immediately purify ourselves, even as he is pure^e.” Let us then never be satisfied, till “ Christ is fully revealed in our hearts^f,” and till we so “ behold his glory as to be changed by it into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord^g.”]

^b Isai. lxii. 6, 7.

^c 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^d Rom. xii. 1. 2 Cor. viii. 5.

^e 1 John iii. 3.

^f Gal. i. 16.

^g 2 Cor. iii. 18.

